DRAGON

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A Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying Game Supplement

Editorial:
Touch of Evil

By Christopher Perkins

I began my gaming career as a freelancer, writing adventures for *Dungeon*® magazine and bombarding my editors with adventure proposals, one of which I recall was built around the premise of the characters being evil. I can't remember whether it was Roger Moore or Barbara Young who shot down the idea, but I remember the editor's response clearly: *We don't publish adventures for evil characters. The heroes fight evil; they are not themselves evil.*

Makes sense to me. It's one thing to say, "This game lets you play evil characters." It's another to endorse a somewhat niche way of playing the game with a full-blown magazine article featuring "heroes" who are anything but.

That said, D&D® is first and foremost a roleplaying game, and sometimes the most alluring and complex character roles are the morally ambiguous or outright villainous ones. How many home D&D campaigns over the years have included so-called heroes with a broken moral compass? Too many to count. It might be the rogue who steals treasure from her companions, the chaotic sorcerer who blows up taverns in a rage, or the paladin who never lifts a finger when his adventuring companions behave maliciously. These evil archetypes have been causing campaign mayhem for years.

The D&D rules have always allowed for evil player characters while clearly stipulating that the game functions better without them. More often than not, their presence dissolves the moral fabric of the adventuring party, inciting conflicts that ultimately spell the campaign's demise. In some rare instances, a well-played antihero can thrive, but when given carte blanche to play evil, some players are so seduced by the novelty that they throw all morals and ethics out the window. Or worse: The evil character becomes an excuse for the player to act like a jerk at the game table.

In 2002, the *Book of Vile Darkness* gave players license to explore morally and ethically challenged heroes. It also provided advice to help DMs navigate the obvious pitfalls. To those who bought the book, the most controversial element proved to be the "Mature Audiences Only" sticker on the front cover, which was more of a marketing device than a reflection of the book's PG-13 content, and it wasn't the sticker's message that people objected to but rather the *sovereign glue* that made it impossible to remove!

The *Book of Vile Darkness* was not without controversy, however. You might recall Tracy Hickman's public condemnation of the book and the magazine articles that supported it. Despite the attention, the book remains one of the most successful and critically acclaimed D&D products of all time, which suggests that players saw value in the content and judged it worthy regardless of the fact that its content both embraces and violates the core D&D experience—which, curiously enough, embodies the spirit of heroism and cooperation but also advocates the personal gain of power by killing other creatures and taking their stuff.

So here we are once more! *The Book of Vile Darkness* for D&D 4th Edition releases this month. It's a different product from its predecessor but addresses the same basic need: helping players build antiheroic and villainous characters, and helping DMs create campaigns that can both withstand and challenge them. There's no "Mature Audiences Only" label this time because, well, we have a pretty good idea who's going to buy this product and their maturity level. (Insert joke about D&D players here.)

In *Dragon*®, we're supporting this month's "touch of evil" theme with the black-hearted knave and the infernal prince character themes. In *Dungeon*, we have a short adventure featuring a blackguard villain and his succubus concubine, an article on Glasya (the daughter of Asmodeus), and a random batch of hordelings worth their weight in experience points. Plenty of evil for everyone! However, we're treading lightly on this month's theme because we know evil characters aren't for everyone. Drop us a note at dndinsider@wizards.com to let us know what *you* think.

P.S. The article submission window is now closed until April 1, 2012. Thanks to everyone who submitted pitches. If you haven't heard from us yet, you will soon!

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Not Fair Assault, Part 2

By Shelly Mazzanoble

Illustration by William O'Connor

The air was stale. The tension palpable. A tumbleweed blew across the conference room table. Is that a harmonica I hear? No. Just a squeaky filing cabinet. I could feel the dust rising and churning around me as I stared into the eyes of Dungeon Master, Chris Tulach, my most dreaded enemy.

"I have a stomachache," I said.

"No wonder," Bart said, nodding to the pile of red and gold candy wrappers in front of my character sheet. "You just ate your weight in chocolate and peanut butter."

"Whoa," Chris Lindsay waved his hands in front of him. "Didn't anyone ever tell you not to comment a lady's eating habits?"

I pounded my fist on the table. "I'm no lady! I'm Chris Tulach's Mom."

The guys leaned away from the table. This was not their battle to fight after all.

"Well, Mom," Tulach said, arranging minis on the playmat. "I hope you brought your Dramamine and arm floaties, because things are about to get rough."

Our characters were about to embark on an open seas journey at the bequest of Soman Galt, the mayor of Neverwinter.

"Maybe Dramamine and arm floaties aren't such a bad idea after all," I said, looking at the vast amounts of blue on the map.

"I think you might be metagaming," said Chris Lindsay, remembering the story I told him about the two hour "Barf Boat" I endured traveling between Santorini and Crete. Yeah, you want to talk about ancient volcanic calderas? You ain't seen nothing until you're forced to witness 135 Grecian senior citizens whip out their plastic grocery sacks and let loose with a cacophony of stomach eruptions. But that is a story for another time.

Marc casually swept the candy bowl out of my reach while making like he was reaching for Josh's collection of minis. I pretended I didn't notice. Secretly I wanted to punch his eyes out.

So back to this ship we were on.

"Lord Neverember has learned of this ancient artifact, the *Talon of Umberlee*, and believes it can protect his city," Tulach explained. "A not so merry band of adventurers set out before you on this very same mission and failed miserably."

"Always a good omen," Josh noted.

"Oh!" I squealed. "I love Lord Neverember!"

Again, blank stares all around.

"What? Chris Tulach's Mom thinks he's hot."

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"Oh, lord," Tulach moaned. "I suppose there's worse people she could be hot for."

I was about to dive into a paternity cover-up scheme but (thankfully) got interrupted by Tulach as Mayor Galt.

"It won't be easy," he promised. "Tidescourge pirates are merciless, and they'll be expecting you." With that he laughed like the true Dungeon Maniac I've come to discover he is.

"We are at your service," Chris Tulach's Mom said. "Please give Lord Neverember my number. And this picture of me."

"Yes," Tulach nodded. "Mom always was photogenic."

We didn't know much about the adventure (which says a lot, considering that each of us has had a copy of it for at least a month), but we did know water was involved and there would be no short or extended rests. Rituals were permitted at the beginning of the adventure so Chris Lindsay cast a Water Walk on the party. Nice gesture, but Chris Tulach's Mom could pretty much water walk in her sleep. She was packing an *elixir of levitation* (as a backup) and, thanks to her genasi roots, she could also breathe underwater (as a backup for the backup.) This crack team was set on accomplishing what so few in this building ever had—getting out of this conference room alive.

"Lord Neverember has discovered that the culprits who killed the last band of adventurers are holed up in the pirate haven of Murdershoal."

"Oooh, Murdershoal," Marc cooed in an affected accent. "I *always* summer in Murdershoal."

I made like I was reaching for Chris Lindsay's eraser and casually scooted the candy bowl back into my range. I grabbed some and shoved it into my face so quickly that I may have ingested part of the wrapper along with the bar. The guys did a fine job pretending they didn't notice.

Tulach divulged another piece of intel that Lord Neverember gained from a captive pirate.

"It's very common for the ship captains to carry horns while on Murdershoal. If they sense any trouble, they sound the alarm and reinforcements come on the run."

"A horn?" I asked. "Like we're supposed to be afraid of a horn?"

Tulach smiled. "When the horn sounds you'll have exactly five rounds to find the *Talon of Umberlee*, flee Murdershoal, and row back to safety."

"Or?" Chris Lindsay asked.

"Or you're shark bait," he shrugged. "Good luck, Mom."

We set off just before dawn, which boded well as far as we're concerned. Even the cast of the Jersey Shore was sure to be passed out by dawn. We made our way to Murdershoal easily. So easily it made me nervous.

"Can we hear anything?" I asked Tulach.

"Give me a Stealth check," he said.

Deep breath. The first die roll is always the indicator for the rest of adventure.

"18," I said. "Oh wait, that's not an 8. That's a smudge of chocolate. 13."

The rest of the group fared well enough, meaning we were able to climb aboard without waking any of the knaves. Garrett (played by Bart) and Sarthian (played by Josh) went in first.

"What do you see?" Chris Lindsay's Danylyn whispered.

"Treasure . . ." Josh answered back. "And two sleeping pirates."

Hoping to avoid having to explore the sheets these dirty knaves were sweating out last night's debauchery on, they decided the chest was as good as any a place to start looking for an ancient artifact. Josh looked to Bart, whose character was the only other person in the room and therefore—according to Tulach's strict *no table talk goes unpunished* rules—was the only one who could truly advise him on what to do. Unfortunately for those who appreciate their slumber, Garrett has never met a locked chest he didn't want to bash open in the most grandiose of ways. Garret and Sarthian took turns smashing it with their swords. Perhaps the sounds of metal splintering wood and the clanging of two thousand gold pieces crashing to the floor might not wake up someone like me (I've slept through two earthquakes, a massive windstorm, and the winter of 2009, when my next-door neighbors discovered *Left for Dead 2*), but I was pretty sure this would arouse the two sleeping bandits.

Guess what?

It did.

"Avast! Intruder!" Tulach yelled in a precise pirate imitation.

"Let's row!" I yelled, accidentally smooshing the Take 5 I didn't realize was in my fist.

"No," Chris Lindsay said, glaring at me, as if to say, *I giveth you that character. Don't you dare taketh her away.*

Of course. What was I thinking? These two rum-swilling peg-legs had nothing on a sweet mother of three from the Midwest. Let's get this party started.

"Your move, Mom," Tulach said. "What's it gonna be?"

"Chris Tulach's Mom will climb up the ladder and blast the closest pirate with a *magic missile*." Why, yes, I did have lots of fancy powers, but I liked to warm up with an old standby. It turned the old bootlegger to dust.

"Argh," the fallen pirate's bunkmate yelled to me. "Your mother had congress with an aboleth!"

"Wait," I asked. "Whose mother? My mother? As in your grandmother? Or my mom as in Judy?" I was so confused.

"You lice-infested sea urchin!" Tulach shouted back. "Ye'll meet the end of a plank for that!"

Well, clearly someone had done his research.

The room we entered overlooked the bowels of the ship where we saw a few stragglers bound and determined to lick the bottom of the rum barrel. Thankfully they hadn't spotted us yet. Sarthian took out pirate number two with his long sword and blocked the door in case the rest of the crew heard the commotion. Garret had another rock star idea and shouted at the pirates down below.

"What are you doing?" I asked him.

"Distracting them," he said all matter-of-fact. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, these were the same pirates who *hadn't even spotted us yet*.

"Arrrrrrrrr!"

Just as Sarthain was about to tell him to cool it, he got tossed aside by Captain Bloodbath herself.

"Ye old bugbears!" she shouted. (Not an insult as I happen to love bugbears.) "Ye freebooters won't never get our treasure!"

At that, we were reminded of the treasure and began rifling through the chest's contents in search of the *Talon* while Garret and Sarthian prepared to handle Ms. Bloodbath. Nothing. Theren (played by Marc) poked his head in just long enough to determine his services were better suited to finding the next treasure chest. Garret climbed up into the rafters.

Of course, Bloodbath didn't travel alone. A gaggle of henchmen arrived in the doorway.

"Dead men tell no tales, ye scrappy swine!" she bellowed. "Get them!"

They obeyed, shooting a bolt through Garret's arm, pinning him to a beam.

"You take twenty-nine points of damage," said Tulach.

Gasp!

"Are you kidding?"

"You did not just say twenty-nine!"

"For just him? That's crazy!" shouted Chris Lindsay.

"You can take some, too, if you want," Tulach said. "They shoot a bolt at Danlyn. Does twenty-three hit your armor class?"

Chris shook his head, having quite literally dodged a bullet.

This was nuts. The first enemy attack and already someone had lost more hit points than I did in the entire last season of D&D Encounters.

"Oh yes," Tulach said. "This is not your mama's D&D."

"No," I said. "But it's *yours*."

"Right," he smiled. "Speaking of which, it's your turn, Mom."

All right, I thought. I could get out through the window and water walk to where Theren was. Presumably these seahags can't. No doubt there was lots more where they came from. (Is it meta-gaming if the giant Tupperware container of minis your DM has packed is in your direct line of sight?) Soon this room would be teeming with twenty-nine-damage bolts, but only if the pirates could get in here.

Of course! They couldn't get in if I cast *grasp of the grave* right over the threshold. Even if I missed (which, as it turns out, I didn't) the spell would do fifteen points of damage to all enemies in the burst.

"All done, Mom?" Tulach asked.

"Yes, sweetheart, that ought to do it."

Sarthian attempted to stab Captain Bloodbath in the face but missed. Apparently, she didn't like people waving sharp objects in her mug. More insults and bolts got fired. More unusually high damaged got dealt and taken. Garrett remained pinned, Theren demolished another treasure chest, Sarthain finally stabbed someone in the face, and Danlyn cast *crown of madness* on Bloodbath, causing her to attack one of her allies. This all went down in about seventeen seconds. I was neck deep in a rapid-fire, tactical battle of wit and wile, and there were still hours to go. Would I be able to keep up? What if my dice failed? Would anyone notice if I had another Take 5 bar?

Things inadvertently slowed down on my turn. I had an eight-page character sheet that suddenly seemed to be written in hieroglyphics. Just as I was about to delay my action indefinitely, Chris Lindsay, my wizard's wizard, got all Obi-Wan on me.

"Use the fury," he whispered

I nodded. *The fury*! Of course. How could I forget that!

"I'd like to cast *wizard's fury*," I said. I was so excited about this ability that allowed Chris Tulach's Mom to drop a *magic missile* once per turn as a minor action until the end of the encounter. Not a bad bonus, right? "Then I'll use *lightening bolt* on Bloodbath and the two guys closest to her."

Zig!

Zig!

Zig!

Christine hit them all and even bloodied the captain. I could tell Tulach felt torn, watching his monsters get their asses kicked and witnessing his mother's awesome pirate booty-beating prowess.

This wasn't going the way he had hoped. "Someone is dying today," I heard him say.

As the encounter progressed I noticed an odd trend. When I got hit, I remembered to use my shield. When I cast a burst, I made sure none of my allies were in it. And when a pirate gasped his last breath at my feet, I used *lifetaker* and gave the temporary hit

points to Garret, who was still pinned and dying in the rafters above. Who *was* this girl holding her own and having a good time doing it? This was *so* not me. Well, almost.

"How many turns have you had since you cast *wizard's fury*?" Chris Lindsay asked me.

"I don't know. Three? Four?"

"And how many free *magic missiles* have you cast?"

"Umm . . . none?"

He palmed his forehead. He's my usual DM, so he's used to this sort of thing.

Ah yes, *that* was me. Oddly, it made me feel better.

Then the horn sounded—now we weren't just up against Bloodbath and her crew, but time as well.

"How about, for every *magic missile* you cast, you get a Take 5?" Marc suggested.

There were only two chests left to search and, thanks to our level, we still had most of our encounters powers. We could levitate and walk on water. If we needed to, we could ditch the stupid talon, willingly walk the plank, and hightail it out of there with a few extra gold pieces and some good stories. I mean really, this wasn't *that* hard. (Obviously none of those people who thought this adventure was so hard had Chris Lindsay create their characters for them.) But then there was the matter of Garret in the rafters.

"Secure the chests," the first mate shouted, causing what seemed like hundreds of henchmen to run in various directions. There was barely enough room on the map for all the minis Tulach was unloading.

"Looks like someone opened a 'flask of never-ending pirate' in here," Josh said, having Sarthian teleport three squares—through a wall.

Tulach was not as amused. "I will kill some people by the end of this turn."

So weird, I thought. This is not the banana bread baking, Christmas card giving guy I raised. Chris Tulach's Mom was so disappointed.

On my turn, I climbed into the rafters with Garret and freed him from his perch. "You owe me."

"I'll buy you dinner," he said.

"I'd rather have the *Talon of Umberlee*. Let's go!"

We skittered along the rafters until we were over the room with the only chest that hadn't been searched and destroyed.

"I'll defer to you on the best way to open that, Garret."

On his turn he jumped from the rafter, landed square on the chest, and shattered it.

Tulach did some dice rolling behind the screen. "How about twelve damage for that move?" he asked. "Should have been more but I gave you points for creativity."

And what to our wondering eyes should appear? Yes, the *Talon of Umberlee*. While Garret nursed his splinters, Chris Tulach's Mom retrieved the coveted artifact and hid it under her robes.

Figures. The only time I remembered to cast *magic missile* there was no one to fire it at. Using my action point, I left Garret with a *potion of levitation* and scurried off the ship with the artifact so important that they named a whole adventure after it.

Between a combination of fey-stepping, levitating, and water walking, everyone made their way back to the rowboat and we wasted no time hitching away from Murdershoal and back to our ship, the *Neverwinter's Pride*. Success! And with one round to go before we were all considered shark bait. We beat this thing down, and in less than two hours. That had to be a record. I suggested we all go out for beers to celebrate.

"Even you," I smiled at Tulach.

"Yeah," Josh said. "Maybe when we *finish*."

Finish? I thought. *Finish cleaning up our dice? Finish wiping that smug grin of Tulach's face? Finish these Take 5 candy bars?*

"There's no time," Tulach said which I assumed meant he only booked the room for two hours. "Suddenly the ship rocks and creaks as though in pain! Four massive tentacles explode out of the water, depositing scaly green humanoids on the deck."

Tulach pranced behind his DM screen like he had flaming pebbles in his sneakers. "Oh yes. I *am* going to kill someone by the end of this game," he mumbled.

"Wait," I asked hesitantly, "There's *more*?"

All eyes turned to me.

"You thought that was *it*?" Marc asked.

"There's at least two more hours!" Tulach said. "*If* you make it that far."

Next thing I knew the green humanoids were attacking and someone had definitely released the kraken. We were embroiled in another epic battle—one where I didn't have the liberty of forgetting to use a freebie *magic missile* every round.

"The kraken goes freakin' nutballs on you, Mom." Someone like Tulach has probably waited his whole life to say that.

I'm not going to give you the play-by-play of this half of the challenge. (You're welcome.) I suspect some of you are experiencing it first hand for yourselves. What I will say is that even with our crazy high damage rolls—twenty-nine here, thirty-five there—we weren't even close to bloodying the sea beasts. We took incredible amounts of damage, too, and somehow our cleric, Danlyn, kept healing us. I kept watching Chris Lindsay, my touchstone, the same way I seek out the flight attendants on a bumpy flight. I won't panic until they do. Chris Lindsay was relishing every minute.

Tulach didn't get his TPK. He didn't kill anyone, much to his dismay. But he did manage to release something even more ancient and powerful than the *Talon of Umberlee*. In the face of such an antagonizing, trash-talking, mother-threatening, empty-promising Dungeon Mastery, I became a strategic, alert, tactical powerhouse. Who knew?

"Impressive game, Mom," Tulach said as I emptied a foot-high pile of candy wrappers in the trash. "I thought for sure you'd be a goner."

"Never underestimate mother's instinct," I said. "You weren't too bad yourself. I'm oddly proud of you." Maybe I was a little *too much* in character.

Truthfully I didn't know I had it in me, and I may have my Dungeon Master to thank for unleashing it. Then again, it may have just been the candy.

About the Author

Shelly Mazzanoble is happy to report that though Chris Tulach's Mom took quite a beating, she is convalescing safe and sound at an undisclosed Mount Hotenow spa.

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Character Themes: Black-Hearted Knave

By Robert J. Schwalb

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Glory, gold, and power are powerful temptations, and no shortage of talented individuals willingly pit their abilities against the world's most dangerous monsters and brave the dungeon depths to gain them. Many adventurers take up their professions out of a moral obligation to drive back the darkness and to protect civilization against ruin. Some seek personal gain, preferring to go their own ways rather than to align themselves with an ethical force. Others are touched by darkness and twisted by evil, and these individuals have a self-serving ambition that enables them to commit atrocities similar to or worse than that of the monsters and villains they fight. *The Book of Vile Darkness*™ introduces several character themes to help you construct player characters who are tempted or touched by evil. This article adds the black-hearted knave to their ranks.

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Black-Hearted Knave

"Of course I'm out for myself. If I don't look out for me, who will?"

Personal gain motivates the black-hearted knave. Scoundrels of the highest order, these cunning, untrustworthy villains exploit, betray, and deceive, having little concern for the people they hurt and the lives they destroy. Knaves encompass a wide range of characters, from the charlatan foisting colored water off as a cure for ills to the charming rake who steals hearts and purses in equal numbers. Turncoats, bandits, and public figures might be knaves in secret, masking their true intentions behind facades.

One does not make a career of double-crossing and exploiting people without risking consequences. Rather than advertise their villainy, many knaves go to great lengths to stay above suspicion. A good disguise is sometimes all a knave needs. Fabricating a history, adding possible relations, and becoming established in a community gives the knave freedom to pursue his or her goals. Others work their trickery by being exceptional liars. A ready story and a convincing manner can divert a skeptic's attention elsewhere.

Black-hearted knaves don't put down roots. No matter how many safeguards they have in place, a simple gaffe or a glimmer of recognition by a prior victim is all it sometimes takes to expose a knave for what he or she truly is. Adventuring provides a knave with a ready excuse to move from place to place. Between expeditions, he or she works schemes in whatever town or hamlet that has the bad fortune to serve as a host to the knave. Then, before anyone grows the wiser about what has been done, he or she moves off, drawn toward the next dungeon and adventure.

Character Themes

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. Consider the black-hearted knave, for example. You might be a charlatan who peddles snake oil to unsuspecting commoners. Or you might be a dashing scoundrel who charms fair maidens and steals their fortunes. Your theme encompasses several possible stories within the same broad concept.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore" in *Dragon* 399.

Creating a Black-Hearted Knave

The black-hearted knave lurks among almost every people and culture. The selfishness and cruelty required to become a black-hearted knave are in no way unique to any class or race; such peculiar villainy owes its origin to some terrible circumstance that set the individual on darkness's path. An ordinary man or woman might turn to skulduggery after being used by another villain in the past, thus becoming embittered and cynical. A hard life on the streets can corrupt one's good intentions and stain a soul with darkness.

Most knaves benefit from strong personalities. Witty or menacing, inspiring or magnetic, they manipulate people around them. The talents of the bard make such characters eminently suited to become black-hearted knaves. Not only do they have the requisite charisma, but they can supplement their devious nature with manipulative spells to ensure that people around them behave as they wish. Rogues also possess skills and exploits that are perfect for expressing and reinforcing the knave's preferred methods.

Other characters can also do well as knaves. Fey pact warlocks and enchanters incorporate magic into their techniques whereby they bend minds to their wills. A power-mad sorcerer might sacrifice others to hoard magical knowledge and baubles, while a disgraced knight or paladin could use a knave's techniques to make his or her way in the world after some public shame. Regardless of class, the black-hearted knave character theme is probably an inappropriate option for good or lawful good characters and should be limited for use by unaligned or evil characters.

Starting Feature

You are a villain who lies, cheats, and steals from anyone you can. Alliances are worthwhile only for as long as they benefit you, and the moment you can gain a greater advantage, you set them aside. *Treacherous advantage* demonstrates just how far you go to get the upper hand when your life is on the line.

Benefit: You gain the *treacherous advantage* power.

Treacherous Advantage — Black-Hearted Knave Attack

Shoving an ally into danger creates a distraction so that you can move into an advantageous position.

Encounter ✦ Martial, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee 1**
Primary Target: One ally
Effect: You push the primary target up to 2 squares, and he or she grants combat advantage until the start of your next turn. You then shift up to half your speed and make the secondary attack.
Secondary Attack
Secondary Target: One creature
Secondary Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + your highest ability modifier damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.
Level 11: 3[W] + your highest ability modifier damage.
Level 21: 4[W] + your highest ability modifier damage.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

A little truth can make a lie go a long way. Rather than spout an utterly outlandish claim, you pepper your falsehoods with just enough truth to make your deception believable.

Benefit: Whenever you would make a Diplomacy check or an Intimidate check, you can instead make a Bluff check with a –2 penalty.

Level 10 Feature

You do not always have the time to construct an elaborate ruse to mislead your victims. Sometimes you have to think fast.

Benefit: You can use a minor action in place of a standard action when making a Bluff check to gain combat advantage or to create a diversion to hide.

Optional Powers

The more you indulge your duplicity, the more tricks and techniques you learn to help you make your way in the world. You can make the best of your situation and leave the danger to those fighting at your side.

Level 2 Utility Power

No one knows the consequences of exploiting others better than you. Enemies abound, and the only way to stay alive is to stay out of reach.

Flee Peril — Black-Hearted Knave Utility 2

When the enemy gains the upper hand, you waste no time making good your escape.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An ally within 5 squares of you is hit by an attack.
Effect: You shift up to half your speed.

Level 6 Utility Power

You have to protect yourself, so you put yourself first in every situation. *Surprising betrayal* helps you escape a dangerous predicament by forcing an ally to face the threat on your behalf.

Surprising Betrayal — Black-Hearted Knave Utility 6

You shove a nearby ally into an attack's path so that you can slip away unscathed.

Encounter ✦ Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Melee** 1
Trigger: A creature hits or misses you with a melee or a ranged attack.
Target: One ally
Effect: You and the target swap positions (the target slides 1 square, and you shift 1 square). The target is hit or missed by the attack, instead of you.

Level 10 Utility Power

You have accumulated more enemies than you know what to do with. You can't outrun them all, so a little trickery can help when they invariably catch up to you. *Duplicitous evasion* helps you turn aside an enemy's attack so it hits a far more deserving target.

Duplicitous Evasion — Black-Hearted Knave Utility 10

You duck behind another creature to escape an attack, leaving it to fend for itself.

Daily ✦ Martial
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy makes a melee or a ranged attack against you while you are adjacent to at least one other creature.
Effect: You gain a +4 power bonus to all defenses against the triggering attack. If the attack misses you, you can swap positions with an adjacent creature other than the triggering enemy (the creature slides 1 square, and you shift 1 square), and the enemy repeats the attack against that creature.

About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb has contributed design to or developed nearly two hundred roleplaying game titles for Dungeons & Dragons®, *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay*, *A Song of Ice and Fire RPG*, *Star Wars RPG*, and the *d20 system*. Some of his more recent work for Wizards of the Coast can be found in *Book of Vile Darkness* and *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™. He's also a regular contributor to both *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines. For more information about the author, be sure to check out his website at www.robertjschwalb.com or follow him on Twitter (@rjschwalb).

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Glory, gold, and power are powerful temptations, and no shortage of talented individuals willingly pit their abilities against the world's most dangerous monsters and brave the dungeon depths to gain them. Many adventurers take up their professions out of a moral obligation to drive back the darkness and to protect civilization against ruin. Some seek personal gain, preferring to go their own ways rather than to align themselves with an ethical force. Others are touched by darkness and twisted by evil, and these individuals have a self-serving ambition that enables them to commit atrocities similar to or worse than that of the monsters and villains they fight.

The Book of Vile Darkness™ introduces several character themes to help you construct player characters who are tempted or touched by evil. This article adds the infernal prince to their ranks.

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Infernal Prince

"Within me burns the might of an infernal lineage. Those who stand against me face the wrath of the Nine Hells."

Eager to extend their influence into the world, the lords of the Nine Hells have long mingled their essence with those of chosen mortals to create bloodlines tainted with infernal power. Although the link between an infernal progenitor and his or her fiendish scions might stretch over many generations, the strength of the bloodline persists, and those "blessed" with such a legacy are potent tools of evil. Inheritors of a hellish strength, these infernal princes can call upon an array of diabolical abilities.

Although many infernal lords have engendered mortal bloodlines, Asmodeus and Mephistopheles have been the most prolific. Infernal princes who can trace their lineage back to either archdevil are by far the most common of their ilk, and both Asmodeus and Mephistopheles actively involve themselves in the lives of their progeny. An infernal prince might be unaware that his or her blood and soul churns with the essence of an archdevil, and the diabolical power resulting from this union typically lies dormant until the character reaches young adulthood.

In the case of an infernal prince bearing the blood of Asmodeus or Mephistopheles, a tutor sent by the archdevil arrives when the dark urges that herald a diabolical awakening manifest in that individual. This tutor is often a cleric or a warlock devoted to the archdevil, and his or her first order of business is to remove the fledgling prince from home and the influence of parents, who remain unaware of their child's ancestry because, for whatever reason, their own potential was never great enough to warrant the attention of an archdevil. The tutor's goal is to ensure that the student embraces his or her heritage and serves the archdevil whose blood flows through his or her veins. An infernal prince is still mortal, however, and the decision to embrace evil and follow in the footsteps of one's progenitors is his or hers to make. An individual must consciously choose the diabolical path to gain access to its power.

Infernal princes can rise high in the service of the archdevil whose blood they share, and they are quite skilled at leading other mortals into darkness. Within an adventuring party, an infernal prince plays the part of a committed comrade and takes pains to keep his or her true allegiance a secret. The character works to lead companions into wickedness, subtly pushing them to commit acts of evil that seem innocuous but form a slippery slope into spiritual corruption. Once these companions are committed to evil, the infernal prince inducts them into the service of his or her patriarch, swelling the ranks of mortals who serve the interests of the Nine Hells.

Character Themes

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity. For example, the infernal prince theme is well-suited to a tiefling character or warlock with the infernal pact who wishes to explore the true depths of fiendish power, embracing the darkness within rather than fighting against it. Other potential classes that provide a good fit for this theme include bards, evil clerics and paladins, and sorcerers. Additionally, nearly any character with this theme might uncover a dark secret within his or her family lineage—a mingling of devil's blood with a distant ancestor—and choose to open fully to diabolical influence and the power it brings. For an added twist, deva characters with this theme could see the taint of the Nine Hells push them—perhaps willingly—toward reincarnation as a rakshasa.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

Creating an Infernal Prince

Infernal princes come from many walks of life, since the lords of the Nine Hells value a diverse set of skills and powers. That said, characters who specialize in arcane or martial trickery and have access to powers with the fire keyword stand to gain the most benefit.

Starting Feature

Your devilish ancestry provides you with an affinity for fire and a tenuous link to the Nine Hells. In times of great stress or peril, you can draw energy from the infernal realms in the form of blistering hellfire. This potent weapon withers flesh and strikes terror into the hearts of those who stand against you.

Benefit: You gain a +1 power bonus to fire attack rolls.

In addition, you gain the *hellfire heart* power.

Hellfire Heart — Infernal Prince Attack

You bolster an attack with roiling hellfire, drawing upon your infernal heritage to burn and terrify your foe.

Encounter ✦ Divine, Fear, Fire
No Action **Special**
Trigger: You hit an enemy with an attack.
Effect: The enemy takes fire damage equal to 1 + your highest ability modifier. Until the start of your next turn, the enemy takes a -2 penalty to the attack rolls of attacks that include you as a target.
Level 11: 3 + your highest ability modifier fire damage.
Level 21: 5 + your highest ability modifier fire damage.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Part of your infernal inheritance is a silver tongue, and your words are honeyed lies that sway the unperceptive and weak of will. Your deceit rings especially true in the ears of mortals, a devil's favored prey.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Bluff checks and Diplomacy checks.

Once per encounter, when you roll a 5 or lower on a Bluff check or a Diplomacy check made against a humanoid of the natural origin, you can reroll the check. You must use the second result.

Level 10 Feature

Nothing brings out the devil within you like pain. When you are wounded, your rage boils forth in a tide of flame and vengeance.

Benefit: The first time you become bloodied each encounter, you regain the use of *hellfire heart*. If you then use *hellfire heart* on the creature that bloodied you, the power deals 5 extra fire damage.

Optional Powers

The following powers reflect the diabolical seed within you. You are a scion of a powerful lord of the Nine Hells, and you can draw upon your progenitor's strength to ensure that you are properly compensated for aid given, to lend fiendish skill to your lies and feints, or to bring forth infernal power to bolster your defenses and command the respect and fear of your enemies.

Level 2 Utility Power

In the Nine Hells, nothing is given for free. Pathetic notions of compassion and camaraderie do not exist there, nor do they exist within you. You are more than willing to aid your companions in combat or offer them healing, but such assistance is not offered without compensation of equal value.

Devil's Due Infernal Prince Utility 2

You offer vital aid to your companion—at a very fair price.

Daily ✦ Divine
No Action **Special**
Trigger: You grant an ally a power bonus or enable him or her to spend a healing surge.
Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses until the end of the encounter, and you gain temporary hit points equal to your healing surge value. The ally's healing surge value is then reduced by one-half your level until the end of the encounter.

Level 6 Utility Power

Your bloodline makes you a fiendishly adept liar, and you are skilled at misleading your foes with words or with subtle body language in combat.

Liar's Lure Infernal Prince Utility 6

Your silver tongue and flawless feints create lethal opportunities for you and your allies.

Encounter ✦ Charm, Divine
Minor Action **Close** burst 1
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Effect: Make a single Bluff check and compare it to the passive Insight of each target. If your Bluff check exceeds a target's passive Insight, that target grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

When you let your diabolical lineage manifest, you exude a potent aura of hellish power. As a scion of a great infernal lord, you command fear and awe from your enemies.

Infernal Inheritor Infernal Prince Utility 10

You allow the devil within to emerge, temporarily transforming you into a font of infernal power.

Daily ✦ Divine, Fear, Polymorph
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: All enemies that can see you take a –2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of your next turn, and you assume the form of the infernal inheritor until the end of the encounter. Until this form ends, you gain darkvision, resist 10 fire, and a +2 power bonus to Fortitude and Will.

About the Author

Aeryn "Blackdirge" Rudel is a writer, editor, and game designer who has worked in the gaming industry since 2005. His recent author credits include the Dark Sun® adventures "Lost Cistern of Aravek" and "The Vault of Darom Madar" from Wizards of the Coast and the monster anthology *Blackdirge's Dungeon Denizens* from Goodman Games. Aeryn lives in Seattle with his wife Melissa.

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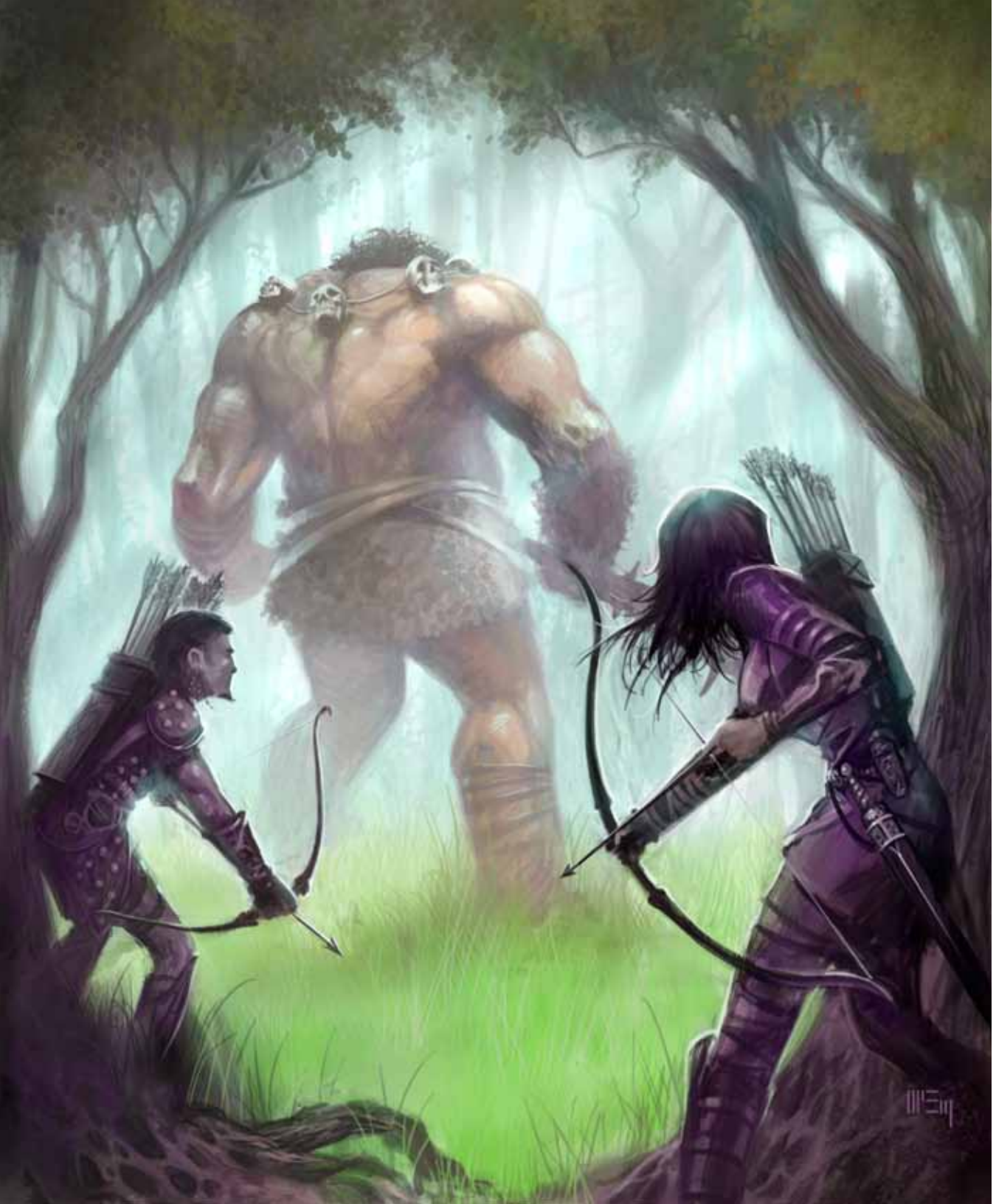

Nerathi Legends: Rangers of Cernall

By Richard Baker

Illustration by Patrick McEvoy
Cartography by Adam Danger Cook

"Some say there is no valor in the bow, the ambush, the escape into forest's gloom. I say there is no valor in sending a hundred warriors to pillage a homestead. When my enemies fight with valor, so will I."

A land torn by war, the March of Cernall lies on the front line of the Vailin Alliance. Soldiers of the Empire of Karkoth occupy nearly half of Cernall's territory, and Karkothi marauders routinely ravage the area. In spite of these grievous reverses in the war against the dark empire, Cernall is not yet defeated. South of the River Wildbyrne, most of Cernall's people remain free and unconquered, sheltered by the rugged terrain of the Gianthelm Mountains. On the north side of the river, some of Cernall's bravest heroes resist the wicked invaders. These legendary Rangers of the Silver Hart are perhaps the finest hunters of beasts, monsters, and foes in the world.

Cernall's story began several centuries ago, when settlers from the human realm of Brandil pushed northward into a promising frontier of deep forests

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and rich coasts. Prosperous towns grew up along its coasts to trade in the timber, furs, amber, and precious metals harvested from the interior. The Forest March, as it was called, offered great opportunity and freedom for anyone willing to dare its trackless wilderness, and it attracted many adventurous souls. Brandil's authority rested lightly on the trappers, hunters, and miners who made their homes in the Wildbyrne Valley, and the frontier folk grew increasingly self-reliant. As with many other lands now counted within the Vailin Alliance, the region never came under Nerathi control, although Nerath's merchants were common callers in the towns and ports of the coast.

The Forest March gained its independence from Brandil about 150 years ago, when Baron Thomed divided Brandil's territories between his daughter Cernyn, the elder child, and his son Heomer, the younger child.

In the customary succession, Heomer would have inherited the entirety of the realm, but Thomed distrusted his vain and feckless son, especially since the northern marches were facing aggressive raids from the gnolls and goblins of the Crimson Plains. Cernyn, on the other hand, was a young woman of tremendous talent—a brave and wise adventurer who resisted all efforts to settle her in a dynastic marriage.

What Baron Thomed did not anticipate was that Cernyn would fall in love with a common-born hero of the frontier, the ranger Dredath Woodhame. As the years passed, Cernyn determined that she would not pass her realm to the children of the brother she loathed. Upon her death, Dredath took up her title and named the realm Cernall in her honor. Baron Heomer objected, but lacked the military power (and the will) to subjugate the new kingdom. Dredath became the first Marchion of Cernall, and he passed the title to his and Cernyn's descendants. To this day, the Barons of Brandil claim Cernall, but none have tried to unify the two lands.

Cernall prospered and grew for many years, but in the last decade or so, hard times came upon the land. Karkoth returned to its old strength, and its avaricious lords (urged on by the powerful cult of the Chained God) brought many of the savages, monsters, and wicked creatures of central Selduria under their dominion. Instead of scattered, disorganized incursions of monsters and raiders on its northern border, Cernall faced Karkothi warthanes and priests of Tharizdun who drove well-ordered legions southward in campaigns of brutal conquest. Virtually everything north of the Wildbyrne was pillaged or abandoned, leaving a wide no-man's land of forest where monsters and raiders roamed . . . but here the Rangers of Cernall chose to make their stand.

Power Structure

The population of Cernall falls into two broad groups, the townsfolk of the southern coasts and the foresters of the northern interior. The townsfolk are made up of humans, halflings, and a handful of elves and half-elves; the frontier settlers also include a large number of shifters, who trace their roots back to tribal groups who roamed the western vales of the Great Wild Wood long before settlers from Brandil began to tame the frontier. Shifters are rarely seen in the towns and are distrusted by Cernallans who think that civilization ends at the southern bank of the Wildbyrne.

The townsfolk and the foresters are held together firmly by the House of Woodhame (well liked by both groups) and the elite fellowship known as the Rangers of the Silver Hart. The rangers are highly respected by townsfolk and foresters alike, and they are invested with wide-ranging authority to protect the people of Cernall and enforce the marchion's laws, no matter where their duty calls them to go.

Rangers of the Silver Hart

Many of Cernall's foresters are trackers, bounders, and hunters by trade, but when people speak of the Rangers of Cernall, they are speaking of the Brotherhood of the Silver Hart. This martial society consists of hundreds of scouts, snipers, trackers, and wilderness warriors in royal service. Most are native Cernallans, but the brotherhood is famous throughout the surrounding lands, so a number of outlanders come to Cernall to fight under the badge of the Silver Hart. These footloose wanderers hail from Valindor and Albrenn, and some are exiles and refugees driven out of Tarsembor and the Broken Lands. A small number are adventurers searching for a place where they can make a difference. The only requirement to join the society is the sponsorship of three members in good standing; the rangers take only those volunteers who can fight, those who possess some woodcraft, and, most important, those who demonstrate great trustworthiness and good judgment.

As the elite warriors of Cernall, the Silver Hart rangers are at the forefront of the ongoing skirmishing and harassment of the Karkothi invaders. They also serve as the marchion's personal guard, protecting her and her family from any would-be assassins. On promotion to the rank of Knight of the Silver Hart, the rangers gain broad discretionary power to act in the marchion's name, commandeer property, and dispense low justice. The order is careful about which members it promotes to this rank, but, to date, the marchions of Cernall have upheld acts or orders given in their name by a Silver Hart ranger.

The emblem of the order is a clasp in the shape of a silver stag's head. Members have no other uniform or common dress.

The Marchion

The current marchion (more properly marchioness, but the feminine derivative is rarely used in Cernall) is Adela Terise Woodhame, the sixth ruler of her line. A beautiful, dark-haired woman of forty-one years, Adela Terise is a powerful warlock with potent fey allies. Though she is labeled "witch" and

"enchantress" by her enemies, the marchion's generous nature and wise rulership have won her the undying love of all loyal Cernallans. Stern and resilient in the face of threats, Adela Terise refuses to allow the burdens of the throne to dampen her spirits, and she delights in the simple good fortunes of her people—a child's joy, a gallant act, a bountiful table. She works tirelessly to defend the unconquered portions of the realm and aid those of her people who have fallen under enemy rule.

Marchion Adela Terise is married to the Lord Consort Narmen Greenmantle, a former Silver Hart ranger who won her heart two decades ago. They have two children; the elder (and the crown heir) is their son Dormeon, a restless young man of fifteen who takes after his father and has a knack for getting into unexpected scrapes.

The Circle of Ancients

A powerful order of shifter druids, the Circle of Ancients has long watched over the pristine forests and deep vales of the upper Wildbyrne and the Great Wild Wood. The Ancients are distrustful of humans, fearing that the slow tide of settlement and clearing must one day spell the doom of the mighty forests they love. The shifters have traditionally opposed any human encroachment in the eastern part of the realm, but over generations they have taught many Cernallan foresters to follow druidic traditions and respect the virgin wilderness. The wanton destruction caused by Karkoth's marauders has further clarified the druids' friends and enemies, earning the dark empire the undying anger of the forest druids. The chief druid in Cernall, known as the Watcher of the Western Vales within the Ancient Circle, is the aged shifter Ulfror Leaffoot.

The Ancients do not have the numbers to directly confront Karkoth's marauding monsters and soldiers, but they are exceptionally skilled spies and scouts. Younger druids track the movements of Karkoth's

forces, passing word to the foresters of Cernall (or directly to the rangers) who then retreat away from the incursion, or else amass forces of their own to waylay the marauders. The circle might not have many warriors to contribute to the battle, but they command age-old druidic magic and wardings in the form of standing stones, secret refuges, and warlike fey allies.

High Darkthane Rhomevor

Much of Cernall north of the Wildbyrne is held by Karkoth's forces. The leader of Karkoth's army on Cernall's border is the High Darkthane Rhomevor Feskth—a cold, calculating, avaricious warlock of forty who is determined to plunder Cernall of its last copper piece as long as he is in charge of bringing it under Karkoth's control. Not all of Rhomevor's masters are pleased by his dedication to increasing his own wealth, but he is protected by a powerful patron

in the Chamber of Thrones. Rhomevor faithfully serves King Brusev of the Groaning Tower before all others, and in turn Brusev protects Rhomevor's personal fiefdom from jealous rivals and the priests of the Chained God.

Rhomevor makes his lair in the Tower of Crows, located in the northern verge of the forest. In addition to a strong garrison of Karkothi soldiers, the Tower serves as the base of operation for several far-ranging bands of gnoll, goblin, and bandit pillagers who plague most of northern Cernall.

Exploring Cernall

Cernall's traditional borders are the Bay of Dolphins and Lake Morningmist in the south, and the plains of the Crimson Ramparts in the north. The eastern border is harder to define; the forest covering most of Cernall is the westernmost arm of the Great Wild Wood, and it's hard to pick a spot where the wood ends and Cernall begins. The best answer to this question of border is probably the Old Ford of the Wildbyrne, the westernmost place where the river shallows can be crossed on foot (although the Old Ford is passable only in summer and fall). Few Cernallans live this far east, and none farther east than this consider themselves to be subjects of the marchion.

Cernall is high, rugged, and thickly forested. The only real lowlands are the southern coasts and the lower vale of the Wildbyrne. The land climbs steeply up toward the Gianthelm Mountains from both north and south, and the greater part of the march lies at an elevation of two or three thousand feet, rising quickly as one travels eastward. The combination of elevation and prevailing winds from the sea brings a good deal of rain to Cernall at all times of year, and it keeps temperatures cool even in the summertime. The Gianthelms rarely reach more than six or seven thousand feet; only the highest slopes see any heavy snowfall in winter. Travel is difficult throughout much of the forest highlands, due to numerous small gorges carved by swift-falling creeks descending from the mountain slopes. However, north of the Wildbyrne, the land levels out into rolling forest-covered hills.

The Wildbyrne

The great river of Cernall is the Wildbyrne, a mighty flood that rises in the heart of the Dragonspine Mountains and flows through the heart of the Great Wild Wood. Through most of Cernall, the Wildbyrne

CAER MADHRIN AT A GLANCE

The capital of Cernall is the fortified town of Caer Madhrin, overlooking the mouth of the Wildbyrne. Several other towns in Cernall are larger and have more commercial importance, but the marchions have made their home in Caer Madhrin for over a century. Despite the threat of Karkothi armies looming just three days' march to the north, Marchion Adela Terise remains in this beautiful old town, a symbol of her land's determination to fight on until the last invader is driven out.

Population Mix: Roughly 8,000 people live in or around Caer Madhrin. Humans and halflings make up most of the population. Elves, half-elves, and shifters are also found in some numbers.

Government: The marchion is the titular ruler of the town, but she has many concerns beyond Caer Madhrin and delegates local matters to a trusted official, the High Castellan Dereod Oakhelm. He is a battle-scarred captain of fearsome appearance and great energy, wiser (and kinder) than he looks.

Commerce: Cernall produces excellent timber, along with furs, precious metals, nuts, and fish. Most trade passes through the larger, safer ports on the Bay of Dolphins, but some merchants choose to call at Caer Madhrin instead. The town imports grain, leather goods, and finished metalwork.

Defenses: Caer Madhrin stands on a high, steep hillside with the wide, deep Wildbyrne at its feet. The town and its strong castle are almost impossible to take from the north or east. The size of its garrison varies, but at least four hundred soldiers and fifty to sixty Silver Hart Rangers are on hand at all times.

Inns and Taverns: The popular Tradewinds Taproom brews the finest ale in all of Cernall. The House of Sojourn is a large, comfortable inn on the hillside overlooking the river. The proprietor is an elf named Rolendo, who takes great pride in treating clients as guests rather than customers.

is a good half-mile in width with no fords or crossings beyond the occasional ferryboat. The river serves as an artery for trade and travel, linking the resource-rich interior with the population of the coastal towns. The Wildbyrne descends steeply throughout its length, and several major rapids prevent the passage of boats. Each set of rapids is circumvented by a portage, some several miles long. In peaceful times, mule teams stationed at each portage move cargo around the rapids, but some of the portages are now abandoned or threatened by Karkothi marauders.

Caer Madhrin

This small, well-fortified town stands on a steep hillside overlooking the Wildbyrne. The castle of Cernall's marchions stands just outside the town, located atop a high bluff. This is the de facto capital of Cernall, since it is the home of the marchions, and the rulers spend most of their time here. The reigning marchion holds court in the larger city of Estafel on the southern coast for three months each spring, and Cernall's Assembly meets there.

This scenic town is built atop stone battlements and streets winding up the hillside, with richly carved wooden homes and palaces perched on abutments. In recent years, Caer Madhrin has been built up with armories, barracks, storehouses, and forges, and it serves as the principal base of supply for Cernall's armies north of the Gianthelms. Thieves, spies, and swindlers—drawn by the ready supply of royal coin and the rising prices of goods—are present in some numbers despite the best efforts of the High Castellan's constables.

Barton Ferry

The largest town in the Wildbyrne Vale is—or more properly was—Barton Ferry. In better days, Barton Ferry was a bustling, prosperous trade-town of five thousand people or more, but now this frontier settlement lies in ruins, having been destroyed a year ago in a Karkothi attack. Gangs of marauding monsters skulk through the ruins, searching for overlooked plunder and waylaying any travelers that pass by. The rangers of the Silver Hart sent strong forces to drive out the monsters several times over the last few months, but more monsters trickled back in after the rangers left. For now, the rangers have decided to maintain a watch on Barton's Ferry and spy out enemy movements, rather than fall upon anything that approaches the town.

The Westermoss

Warm and rain-soaked for much of the year, the Westermoss is a large, forest-covered peninsula that makes up the southwestern quarter of Cernall. A dozen or so small settlements are scattered through the area, most of them fishing villages along the shore. Sheltered against the wars to the north by the mountains and far from the larger, more populous districts near Estafel, the Westermoss is a quiet backwater that serves as Cernall's breadbasket and provides a reliable supply of loyal fighters for the marchion's armies. A dark side exists to this otherwise bucolic setting, however—ancient yuan-ti ruins are hidden deep in the rain-soaked woods, and some still harbor forgotten dangers.

Estafel

The richest and largest settlement in Cernall is the city of Estafel, on the northern shore of the Bay of Dolphins. The only city in Cernall worthy of being called a city, it is easily two or three times the size of the royal capital at Caer Madhrin. Estafel is home to many of Cernall's wealthiest merchants and nobles, and it serves as the seat of the march's Assembly. The marchion moves the court to Estafel each spring and reigns there for several months, but it's not unusual for a marchion to visit the city several times a year in addition to the annual relocation of the court.

Many Cernallans of the southern coasts are not enthusiastic about spending their precious blood and treasure defending thinly settled frontiers north of the Wildbyrne against Karkothi aggression. Whispers against Marchion Adela Terise and her inflexible policies are beginning to circulate in Estafel's parlors and drawing rooms, although some say that this discontent is the work of cunning spies, not concerned patriots.

Hartshall

This secret ranger stronghold is hidden in a deep gorge about thirty miles north of the Wildbyrne. The surrounding forest is fiercely contested between the Cernallans and the various goblin, gnoll, and ogre tribes that owe their allegiance to Karkoth. The hall is a large, strong lodge of fieldstone and timber that is built on a narrow ledge about halfway down the gorge's walls. The forest at the gorge's rim overhead conceals Hartshall from the view of flying monsters or spies, and vigilant archers watch each of the well-hidden trails leading to the rangers' safehold. The master of Hartshall is the human ranger Sir Fromor Vineleaf, a well-seasoned Silver Hart who understands the value of keeping Hartshall secret from Cernall's enemies.

The Old Ford

One hundred fifty miles up the Wildbyrne, the traveler comes to the first place where the river can be forded. A high, rocky islet in the middle of the stream is flanked by shallows on either side that can be waded if the river is not especially high. The islet is perhaps half a mile long and two hundred yards wide; at its downstream end, a moss-grown ring of stone monoliths marks one of the sacred places of the Ancient Circle druids. The old druid Brevann Berstagg lives in the woods nearby, and he guards the ford against all evil creatures.

Tower of Crows

This old fortress is the center of Karkoth's efforts to complete the conquest of Cernall. The tower was once a Brandilan border-fort that fell into ruin and was abandoned when Brandil withdrew from its northern marches. The place was occupied by Karkothi forces several years ago, who set about restoring and expanding the old fort to serve as their base in northern Cernall. The tower is now home to hundreds of Karkothi soldiers and their allied monsters and marauders.

ADVENTURES IN CERNALL

Many heroes come to Cernall in search of a cause worthy of their swords. Defending the march against Karkoth's legions and its hordes of allied monsters is challenge enough, but the forest shade hides older and more perilous dangers than companies of skeletons and bands of gnolls.

The Great Hunt: A terrible beast or monster moves into the Wildbyrne Vale, slaying any in its path. The heroes accept the challenge of hunting it through the trackless forest and putting a stop to the creature's depredations, but Karkothi necromancers plan to raise the beast as an even more powerful undead abomination when it dies.

The Ring of Serpents: A rash of disappearances in a small village of the Westermoss leads the heroes to a long-lost yuan-ti temple hidden in the forest. Cultists of Zehir are searching for an ancient artifact there while kidnapping and subverting local folk.

Five Against Five Hundred: The heroes discover a small army of Karkothi marauders on the march, and they must slow the marauders down as best they can. The adventurers fight a desperate campaign of ambush, delay, trap-building, targeted strikes on leaders, and daring flank attacks to slow the enemy force and crush its will to fight.

Silver Hart Clasp

Rangers of the Silver Hart who perform an act of notable valor or render a great service to the realm are often rewarded with the presentation of a *silver hart clasp*—a brooch that serves as an emblem of the order and a badge of authority respected throughout Cernall. Traditionally, the *silver hart clasp* is awarded personally by the reigning marchion in a private ceremony.

Silver Hart Clasp Level 9+ Uncommon

This large silver brooch is fashioned in the shape of a stag's head. Its enchantments help you to move swiftly and silently in forest settings, and the clasp heals you in time of need.

Lvl 9	+2	4,200 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp			

Neck Slot

Enhancement Bonus: Fortitude, Reflex, and Will

Properties

✦ You have forest walk.

✦ You gain an item bonus to Stealth checks in forests. The bonus equals the item's enhancement bonus.

Utility Power (Healing) ♦ **Daily** (Minor Action)

Effect: You can spend a healing surge. In addition, you can end one poison effect currently affecting you.

The End for Now

This article marks our final installment of Nerathi Legends, at least for now. We set out to provide a small sample of noteworthy locations, situations, and adventure opportunities in the world of the *Conquest of Nerath* game. The intent was to provide interested Dungeon Masters with suggestions and details for potential D&D® games in this world, while providing colorful backdrops and world lore for players interested in the setting. Our apologies to the completists out there—we always intended to leave much of the map blank and provide just a few samples of the setting. Anyway, we're moving on to new material. We hope you have enjoyed the series!

About the Author

Richard Baker is a senior game designer at Wizards of the Coast and New York Times best-selling novelist. When not working on articles and game products for the *Dungeons & Dragons Roleplaying Game*, he designs board games, *Conquest of Nerath* being one of his more recent accomplishments.

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Paragons of Fey Valor

Written and illustrated by Claudio Pozas

The Feywild is a realm of legends, where great sagas are sung about valiant heroes who stand up against the evils that prowl in shadowed forests and glittering caverns. As befits a plane that echoes the magic and stories of the mortal world, the lands of the fey give rise to an enormous variety of champions, be they exemplars of chivalry, determination, or sheer verve. Many a story tells of mortals that came to embody these qualities and earned a place among the fey. This article presents three paragon paths that best represent the myriad ways that mortals can rise to the ranks of Feywild champions.

White Horn Knight: The knights-errant of the Feywild, the White Horn knights ride forth in the name of the Lord of Unicorns.

Moon Hunter: As determined slayers of lycanthropes and other shapechangers, moon hunters find their inspiration from the Maiden of the Moon.

Soaring Rake: Soaring rakes are daredevil ruffians who defy villains and gravity with equal ease.

White Horn Knight

Prerequisite: Proficiency in heavy armor.

Eachthighern (pronounced "Whitehorn"), the Lord of Unicorns, is one of the most respected archfey in the Court of Stars. His wisdom is valued and respected by Queen Tiandra, and rival archfey such as Baba Yaga begrudgingly acknowledge his strength. Unlike most other archfey, Eachthighern takes mortal heroes as his personal knights and sends them forth to stamp out evil creatures wherever they are found.

When Eachthighern needs a new knight, he sends a herald to one of his choices. These heralds are usually eladrin bards, but sometimes he assigns this duty to more exotic fey such as centaurs or unicorns. The herald transports the prospective knight to the Serene Glade, where Eachthighern makes his offer. If the person refuses the offer, Eachthighern is saddened but respects the candidate's wishes. The herald then takes the person back, but this former candidate loses the memories of the audience thanks to the use of a special type of oblivion moss. If the candidate accepts the offer, the Lord of Unicorns touches the person with his horn, in a manner similar to a king knighting a squire. If the newly accepted knight desires it, he or she receives Eachthighern's heraldic symbol of a unicorn rampant in a field of deep blue, but such displays aren't mandatory because Feywild natives instinctively recognize Lord Eachthighern's mark upon the knight.

A White Horn knight's quests include anything from rescuing slaves from fomorian holds to guiding travelers safely through dangerous woodlands plagued by mad dryads, sly verbeeg, or ferocious owlbears. The knights count evil fey such as lamias and

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MORE FEY CHAMPIONS

A plane as varied as the Feywild is by no means limited to the material included in *Heroes of the Feywild* or paragon paths presented in this article. The following paragon paths are particularly appropriate for heroes who want a connection to the Feywild.

Name	Source
Arrow of the Moonbow	*Dragon* 386
Blade Banshee	*Martial Power*
Blade of Cendriane	*Manual of the Planes*
Cunning Prevaricator	*Arcane Power*
Entrancing Mystic	*Arcane Power*
Fey Beguiler	*Player's Handbook 2*
Feytouched	*Player's Handbook*
Half-Elf Emissary	*Arcane Power*
Long Night Scion	*Dragon* 374
Seldarine Dedicate	*Divine Power*
Shiere Knight	*Player's Handbook 2*
Shinaelestran Guardian	*Martial Power 2*
Spiral Tactician	*Martial Power*
Storm Scourge	*Arcane Power*
Stormwarden	*Player's Handbook*
Summer Rhymer	*Player's Handbook 2*
Twilight Guardian	*Player's Handbook 2*
Valiant Hexblade	*Dragon* 393
Watcher of the Night	*Dragon* 366
Wizard of the Spiral Tower	*Player's Handbook*

hags as their greatest opponents, because these creatures often hunt unicorns for their hearts and horns, which such dark fey use in their horrid rituals.

A White Horn knight is blessed with some of the Lord of Unicorns' power and gains the service of a loyal unicorn steed. The knight's abilities mark the character as a valiant leader in the fight against evil. Though most White Horn knights pay ultimate homage to their lord, some also serve Corellon.

Level 11: Unicorn's Advance

Using quick bursts of teleportation, you can sidestep difficult terrain to close the gap on your enemies.

Benefit: You ignore difficult terrain while charging. If you charge while mounted on your unicorn destrier, it shares this benefit.

Level 11: Unicorn's Blood

The blessings of Eachthighern strengthen your body.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against disease exposure and poison effects. If you are mounted on your unicorn destrier, it shares this bonus.

Level 11: Unicorn's Action

When you push yourself to the limit, you channel the healing power of a unicorn to heal yourself or an ally.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to take an extra action, you or an ally adjacent to you regains hit points equal to 5 + your Strength or Charisma modifier.

Level 11: Fierce Respite

You channel your sense of honor and commitment to justice into a single weapon attack that cuts down one enemy even as it heals a nearby ally.

Fierce Respite White Horn Knight Attack 11

Your weapon glows with a pearlescent light, delivering that radiance to your foe even as it gives respite to a wounded ally.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Healing, Radiant, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Strength or Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Strength or Charisma modifier radiant damage.
Effect: You or an ally within 5 squares of you can spend a healing surge. If your unicorn destrier is adjacent to you or the ally, that character regains additional hit points equal to your Strength or Charisma modifier.

Level 12: Call Unicorn Destrier

Once you have proven yourself, Lord Eachthighern deems you fit to receive his most precious gift: a unicorn destrier. Through a specialized spell, you part the barrier between your current location and the Serene Glade, calling forth a unicorn to serve you.

Call Unicorn Destrier White Horn Knight Utility 12

A gentle breeze and a flash of otherworldly light marks the arrival of your unicorn companion.

Daily ✦ Arcane
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Effect: A unicorn destrier appears in an unoccupied space within range. The destrier is an ally to you and your allies, and it serves as a mount to you. While the destrier is serving as a mount, all normal rules for mounted combat apply.

If no one is riding the destrier, it can take only move actions. When the destrier makes a check, you make the roll using your game statistics, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.

The destrier lasts until it drops below 1 hit point, at which point you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left). Otherwise, the destrier lasts until you dismiss it as a minor action or until you start an extended rest.

Unicorn Destrier
Large fey magical beast (mount)

HP your bloodied value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can spend a healing surge for the destrier if an effect allows it to spend one
Defenses your defenses, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties
Speed 8

Traits

Piercing Charger (mount)
If the destrier's rider makes a charge attack and hits, the target of the attack is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Kick** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); your level + 7 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + your Strength or Charisma modifier damage.

Move Actions

Fey Step (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The destrier and its rider teleport up to 5 squares. The destrier's rider must teleport to a square adjacent to the destrier.

Minor Actions

Horn Touch ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: One creature adjacent to the destrier can make a saving throw.

Level 16: Graceful Serenity

The trust placed upon you by Lord Eachthighern gives you greater confidence to face each new battle. Allies that stand beside you are encouraged by your serenity in the face of dangerous foes.

Benefit: During the surprise round and the first round of combat, you gain a +2 bonus to all defenses. While adjacent to you, your allies also gain this bonus.

Level 20: Blessing of Unicorns

At your behest, the planar veil parts, allowing you to receive the *blessing of unicorns* from Lord Eachthighern's forested realm. The majestic creatures trample your enemies and heal your allies before crossing back through the veil to their home.

Blessing of Unicorns — White Horn Knight Attack 20

The glowing forms of many unicorns appear, trampling your enemies and bolstering you and your allies with fey magic.

Daily ✦ **Arcane, Healing**
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Strength + 5 or Charisma + 5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d10 + Strength or Charisma modifier damage, and the target falls prone.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: You and each ally within 2 squares of you can spend a healing surge and regain additional hit points equal to your Strength or Charisma modifier.

Moon Hunter

Prerequisite: Training in Endurance and Insight

Among the archfey, few entities are more mysterious than the Maiden of the Moon. Elusive even to others of her kind, the Maiden of the Moon has only one apparent interest: removing the blight of lycanthropy, both from the Feywild and from the natural world. On the boundaries of the lycanthrope realm of Brokenstone Vale, some who have survived being ravaged by those creatures find inspiration from the Maiden of the Moon, taking up arms to hunt and slay the lycanthropes. In honor of the Maiden, they call themselves the moon hunters.

Moon hunters are attuned to the power of the Feywild's moon, which is larger and brighter than the full moon in the natural world. They can channel its power to harm lycanthropes and other shapeshifting foes. In this manner, they are similar to the fey giants known as firbolgs. Like those hunters, they travel across the Feywild, calling forth auras of moonfire to reveal their enemies in the darkness. Once they find their prey, many use crescent-shaped blades to cut their foes down in a bloody harvest.

In time, most moon hunters expand their hunt to include all creatures that take on another form to prey upon innocent folk, including rakshasas, doppelgangers, hags, oni, and lamias.

Level 11: Silvered Soul

The Maiden's light shines fiercely within you. It guards you from the ravages of lycanthropy and undue influence, and it makes your attacks more effective against lycanthropes and similar creatures.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to saving throws against charm effects and disease exposure. In addition, all your weapon and implement attacks count as silvered.

Level 11: Moonfire Action

Like the mighty firbolg hunters, you have learned to harness the moon's pale illumination. When the stakes are high, you can encase hidden enemies in a halo of silver light that reveals their presence.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to make an attack, creatures hit by that attack cannot benefit from invisibility or any concealment (save ends).

Level 11: Forceful Transformation

Your attacks already benefit from your connection to the Maiden of the Moon. With a greater focus, however, you can affect shapechangers like the moon affects lycanthropes, assaulting their minds and bodies. If your foe can change its shape, your attack causes it to experience mental anguish and physical pain as it fights to maintain control of its body.

Forceful Transformation Moon Hunter Attack 11

Your weapon glows silver as you strike your foe, sending it reeling and causing it intense pain if it is a shapechanger.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Highest ability modifier vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2[W] + your highest ability modifier damage, and the target is dazed until the end of your next turn. If the target has the shapechanger subtype, it is instead dazed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).

Level 12: Maiden's Light

With a single word of praise to the Maiden of the Moon, you become a beacon in the darkness, shedding pale moonlight that leaves shapechangers and creatures changed from their natural forms in a vulnerable state.

Maiden's Light Moon Hunter Utility 12

You shed a bright silver light that reveals your enemies and disturbs those not in their natural forms.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Aura
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You activate an aura 3 of bright light that lasts until the end of your next turn. Enemies that have the shapechanger subtype or are subject to a polymorph effect grant combat advantage while in the aura.
Sustain Minor: The aura persists until the end of your next turn.

Level 16: Maiden's Blessing

You have earned the attention of the Maiden of the Moon, impressing her with your prowess. When you need a moment's respite, the Maiden reaches out to you, offering you relief from a harmful effect.

Benefit: When you use your second wind, you can also make a saving throw.

Level 20: Reflect the Full Moon

As you reach the pinnacle of your power, you have earned the Maiden of the Moon's approval. She grants you the power to call forth the light of the full moon to blind your enemies. Lycanthropes and their ilk are transfixed by the moon's radiance.

Reflect the Full Moon Moon Hunter Attack 20

You project a silver disc of moonlight around yourself. Your enemies' eyes alight with the white radiance, making them incapable of seeing anything but that brilliance.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Radiant
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Highest ability modifier +4 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d6 + your highest ability modifier radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends). If the target has the shapechanger subtype or is currently subjected to a polymorph effect, it takes a –2 penalty to saving throws against this effect.
Miss: Half damage, and the target is blinded until the end of your next turn.

Soaring Rake

Prerequisite: Fey origin, half-elf, fey pact warlock, or Fey Bond feat; training in Acrobatics

All realms see their share of swashbuckling types, whose love for freedom and a happy-go-lucky attitude belie their combat prowess. But the Feywild has given rise to a particularly exotic type of swashbuckler, whose fighting style defies gravity. These daring adventurers are known as soaring rakes.

Soaring rakes gain their uncanny abilities through a variety of paths, though each has a profound link to the Feywild, either from being born in that realm or through a direct connection to one of the Feywild powers (such as being a fey pact warlock or having the Fey Bond feat). This connection to the Feywild

and its ambient magic allows soaring rakes to take to the skies at will. Due to the added element of flight, soaring rakes develop a unique fighting style, and many consider them the ultimate skirmishers.

Most soaring rakes have an outlook on life that mimics their abilities. Problems, dangers, and frustrations affect them less than most, since the rakes can take to the air and leave their worries behind them. In keeping with their carefree attitude, the vast majority of soaring rakes turn to Avandra for worship, trusting in the god of luck to see them through any challenge.

Level 11: Fear No Heights

Your flying abilities manifest subconsciously whenever you fall, slowing you enough to reduce the damage you might take.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to Acrobatics checks, and you take only half damage from a fall.

Level 11: Soaring Action

When you put forth your greatest effort, you can fly through the air, carried aloft by your determination.

Benefit: When you spend an action point, you gain a fly speed equal to your speed until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Soaring Strike

Although it takes some effort, you have mastered the technique of melding short flights with powerful strikes.

Soaring Strike Soaring Rake Attack 11

You leap into the air, weaving through your enemies. Then, like a diving hawk, you strike, startling an unwary foe.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Effect: You fly up to your speed and make the following attack once at any point during the movement. This movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity or Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 2[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier damage.

Level 12: Flight Burst

With minimal effort, you take flight like a Feywild sprite. Tiny motes of glowing dust trail behind you, a clue to the magical source of your abilities.

Flight Burst Soaring Rake Utility 12

With a gleeful heart, you take to the air.

At-Will (Special) ✦ Arcane
Move Action **Personal**
Effect: You fly up to your speed.
Special: You can use this power only once per round.

Level 16: Soaring Combatant

Your ability to fly increases your maneuverability, making it difficult for land-bound foes and clumsy fliers to avoid your attacks.

Benefit: You gain a +2 bonus to melee damage rolls against enemies that have no fly speed or have a clumsy fly speed.

Level 20: Soaring Fellowship

You draw fully upon the Feywild's ambient magic to deliver a mighty strike to an enemy. While the magic flows through you, you extend your magical nature to your companions, and your entire company takes to the air like a flock of birds.

Soaring Fellowship Soaring Rake Attack 20

You deliver a masterful attack, and the magic filling you from the effort takes you and your friends aloft.

Daily ✦ Arcane, Weapon
Standard Action **Melee** weapon
Target: One creature
Attack: Dexterity or Charisma vs. AC
Hit: 4[W] + Dexterity or Charisma modifier damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: You and each ally within 5 squares of you gains a fly speed of 6 until the end of your next turn. When the speed ends, the affected characters descend to the ground, taking no falling damage.
Sustain Minor: The fly speed persists until the end of your next turn.

About the Author

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Secrets of the Fey:
A New Pact for the Binder Warlock

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Jason Juta

This material presents new material for the binder warlock, which first appeared in *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™. For more information about the class, refer to that book or visit the D&D Compendium here.

While many tales of the Feywild make it seem like a whimsical land of enchantment, anyone with planar experience knows that, as with the world of men, there is a dark side to the realm of the fey. Sinister fey creatures, agents of the Unseelie, lurk in the shadows of forests and wait for passing prey. The most powerful of these creatures extend their reach beyond their own realm, tempting and warping the minds of mortals.

Fey pact binders are a means by which dark fey extend their grasp outside of the Feywild. Binders who form pacts with these powerful Unseelie wield shadow-tainted arcane magic, reflecting the dark, corrupted natures of the fey creatures they serve. Many binders have learned not just how to coax knowledge out of these dark fey creatures, but how to become one of them; the unwary fey pact binder is often corrupted by the same malevolence that empowers his or her benefactor.

Alternatively, your fey pact binder might be a dark fey that has taken on the guise of one of the friendlier races, openly using knowledge of Unseelie power while disguising his or her true nature. Such an elaborate disguise often requires the dark fey to actually transform into one of the mortal races; more than just a disguise, the mortal body is a prison in which the power of the dark fey resides.

Level 1: Fey Pact Boon

Some of the first tricks that a fey pact binder masters include how to cloud sight and how to create distractions out of pure shadow. The nature of the power that a binder draws from fey creatures often necessitates luring enemies in close before landing a final strike; a cautious binder learns techniques to keep these lured enemies from inflicting too much harm.

Benefit: You gain the *cloud sight* and *fascinating shadows* powers.

Cloud Sight — Warlock Utility

You draw power from the dying that allows you to exert your will over the minds of other creatures, confusing their perceptions.

At-Will ✦ Arcane, Shadow
Free Action **Close** burst 5
Trigger: You reduce a creature to 0 hit points, or an enemy adjacent to you drops to 0 hit points.
Target: One creature in the burst
Effect: The target takes a –5 penalty to attack rolls made against you until the end of your next turn.
Special: You can use this power only once per round.

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Fascinating Shadows Warlock Attack

You create a dizzying array of images out of the shadows, lulling your enemies into drawing closer.

At-Will ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic, Shadow
Standard Action **Close** blast 5
Target: One or two creatures in the blast
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and you pull the target up to 2 squares. The first time the target attacks you before the end of your next turn, it takes psychic damage equal to your Intelligence modifier.

SKALD TALE: THE WHISPERER IN THE SHADE

Come closer, children, and let me tell you of the whisperer in the shade. In the fey realm's darkest corners, primeval forests harbor patches of shadow that are so deep and dark, creatures can live within them and prey upon the unwary. The whisperer in the shade is one of these creatures. Few have seen its true form, but those who have tell stories of walking alone in the forest and hearing whispers—whispers that call to their very souls. Imagine a young boy alone, unable to resist the call of the whisperer in the shade. Even grown men have wandered to their deaths following the haunting words. Those who get close but manage to pull away tell of two silvery eyes glaring out of the shadows.

Level 1: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Not all of the dark fey in the Feywild are large, powerful creatures. Among the most dangerous are swarms of tiny sprites that can set upon an unwary traveler, bringing a painful death by a thousand cuts. The binder can summon and command a whirlwind of these vicious sprites and watch as they rend the binder's enemies with tiny claws, teeth, and makeshift weapons tipped in painful poisons.

Unseelie Sprites Warlock Attack 1

You call forth a group of tiny, shadow-winged sprites that swarm around your enemies and lash out at them with poison-tipped spears.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Poison, Shadow
Standard Action **Close** burst 2
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Charisma vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + Charisma modifier damage.
Fey Pact (Binder): The target also takes poison damage equal to your Intelligence modifier.

Level 3: Fey Pact Encounter Power

A binder that draws power from the fey quickly learns how to sow confusion among his or her enemies. With the proper application of shadow magic, the mind of a weak enemy can be bent so that they see friends as enemies and enemies as friends. However, those who have their minds clouded in this way often emerge from their shadowy haze to find that they have attacked their own allies.

Lure of Loyalty Warlock Attack 3

You lay a wreath of shadowy confusion over your enemy, drawing it closer and commanding its temporary loyalty.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement
Standard Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: You pull the target up to 4 squares to a square adjacent to you, and the first time an enemy attacks you before the end of your next turn, the target must charge that enemy or make a basic attack against it as a free action.
Fey Pact (Binder): You slide the target up to 3 squares before it makes this attack.
Effect: The target cannot attack you until the end of your next turn

Level 4: Fey Pact Lore

As a result of an ongoing association with a powerful fey creature, the binder learns to weave permanent wards over his or her own body to fend off attacks. Similarly, the binder's mind is so accustomed to the mind-clouding effects of dark fey magic that it becomes inured to such effects.

Benefit: You gain a +1 bonus to AC and Will.

Level 7: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Though many might dismiss tales of men being enchanted by a fey song or by the whispers of a dryad, there is one warning from those tales that all travelers in the Feywild know: never let a creature touch you, for that is the surest way for a capricious fey to make you its slave. The binder masters the magic that makes this possible, and by laying a hand on a foe that gets too close, a warlock can make that enemy into a slave for a short time.

Touch of Command Warlock Attack 7

You touch the one who would dare to strike you, bringing them under your spell.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic
Immediate Reaction **Melee** 1
Trigger: An adjacent enemy attacks you.
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated until the end of its next turn.
Fey Pact (Binder): The target also takes psychic damage equal to 3 + your Intelligence modifier.

Level 9: Binder's Ally (Fey)

A powerful Unseelie patron might be convinced to loan a binder one of its retainers. Among the most common servants of the dark fey are creatures known as satyrs of the night. These satyrs were once just like their Feywild brethren—jovial, carefree, and tricksy. But these satyrs were seduced by the shadowy power of the binder's fey patron and were slowly corrupted into twisted, cruel versions of their former selves.

Benefit: You can use *summon warlock's ally* to summon a satyr of the night.

Satyr of the Night **Level 9 Summoned Creature**
Medium fey humanoid

HP your bloodied value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can expend a healing surge for the satyr if an effect allows it to spend one.
Defenses your defenses + 2, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.
Speed 6

Standard Action ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); your level + 6 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + your Charisma modifier damage, and the satyr can slide the target 1 square. The target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

Minor Action (teleportation) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: The satyr can teleport up to 3 squares.

Minor Action ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Effect: The satyr either walks, shifts, runs, stands up, squeezes, or crawls.

Opportunity Action ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy leaves a square adjacent to the satyr without shifting, or makes a ranged attack while adjacent to the satyr.
Effect: The satyr uses its standard action attack against the triggering enemy.

Level 11: Binder's Action (Fey)

Master binder paragon path feature
Shadow magic infuses the arcane power that fuels your spells, seeping through from your dark patron's own corruption. When you exert yourself, your ability to wield that shadow magic clouds the mind of your enemy.

Benefit: When you spend an action point to make an extra attack, one enemy you hit with that attack is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Binder's Favor (Fey)

Master binder paragon path feature
Whenever you draw upon the corrupted magic of your Unseelie patron, shadows now seem to form over the eyes of those whom you strike.

Benefit: When you hit an enemy with *fascinating shadows*, your allies have partial concealment against that enemy until the end of your next turn.

Level 11: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Master binder paragon path feature
In the deepest, blackest hearts of Feywild forests, there grows a plant. This plant exudes a poison that fills the minds of living beings with terror. You have wheedled the knowledge of this plant out of the dark fey, and can create a facsimile of its vines out of pure shadow.

Nightmare Vines Warlock Attack 11

You conjure up nightmarish vines that seize upon your enemies and hold them still long enough for you to walk by.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Poison, Psychic, Shadow
Standard Action **Area** burst 1 within 10 squares
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Charisma vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + Charisma modifier poison and psychic damage.
Fey Pact (Binder): The target is also restrained and cannot make opportunity attacks until the end of your next turn.

Level 13: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Those who live in cities in the mortal realm, far from fey crossings or forests with a strong fey presence, rarely believe the stories of strong-willed men lured into danger by a dryad's sweet song. You have drawn the knowledge of such magic out of your fey patron, learning to combine that seductive song with other spells. You lure your enemies close to you, then vanish and flit away, leaving them grouped together and vulnerable to your allies' attacks.

Fleeting Call Warlock Attack 13

You utter an enticing whisper, lacing it with the allure of dark fey creatures, fleeing quickly when your enemies get too close.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic, Shadow
Standard Action **Close** burst 3
Target: One or two creatures in the burst
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 3d8 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and you pull the target up to 2 squares.
Fey Pact (Binder): Until the end of your next turn, you become invisible, gain phasing, and can occupy the same space as other creatures. These effects end if you make an attack.

Level 16: Binder's Boon (Fey)

Your ability to manipulate the will of your enemies does more than blind them to the threat you pose; it muddles their senses to the point that they have a hard time putting up a defense against your allies.

Benefit: When you use *cloud sight*, the power's target also grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

Level 17: Fey Pact Encounter Power

As you grow more and more like your fey patron, filled with Unseelie magic and knowledge both dangerous and arcane, you learn to focus your abilities on a single enemy and bend its will to your needs. You make that enemy your faithful servant, ensuring that it turns upon its own allies rather than see you come to harm.

Song of the Siren Warlock Attack 17

You wrap your will around an enemy's mind, enthralling it with your very presence and preying upon its newfound dedication to you.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Shadow
Standard Action **Ranged** 10
Target: One creature
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: Whenever one of your enemies ends its turn adjacent to you, the target must shift up to its speed and make a melee basic attack against that enemy as an opportunity action. This effect lasts until the end of your next turn.
Fey Pact (Binder): You can choose for the target to charge an enemy instead of shifting and making a basic attack. You can make this choice for each enemy the target must attack.
Miss: The target is dazed until the end of your next turn.

Level 23: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Those who are foolish enough to approach you quickly find themselves under your thrall. You are now as much of an Unseelie force as your fey patron, and any who get close enough for you to lay a hand on them quickly turn to strike their own allies.

Unwilling Betrayal Warlock Attack 23

You wait until an enemy is close enough to touch before turning them against their own allies.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Charm, Implement, Psychic
Immediate Reaction **Melee** 1
Trigger: An adjacent enemy attacks you.
Target: The triggering enemy
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated until the end of its next turn. If one of your enemies other than the target is within range of the triggering attack, the triggering attack hits that enemy instead.
Fey Pact (Binder): The target also takes psychic damage equal to 8 + your Intelligence modifier.

Level 25: Greater Binder's Ally (Fey)

A status symbol among many eladrin noble houses and a valued servant among all fey creatures, the displacer beast is a dangerous creature that reflects the predatory and deceptive aspects of the Feywild. Your power has grown to the extent that you can reach into the Feywild and summon one of these creatures. Upon its arrival, it obeys your commands, sensing the Unseelie magic you wield.

Benefit: You can use *summon warlock's ally* to summon a displacer beast.

Displacer Beast **Level 25 Summoned Creature**
Large fey magical beast

HP your bloodied value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can expend a healing surge for the displacer beast if an effect allows it to spend one.
Defenses your defenses + 2, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.
Speed 10

Displacement (illusion)
When a melee or a ranged attack hits the displacer beast, roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, the attack misses instead. On a 9 or lower, the displacer beast loses this trait until the start of your next turn.

Standard Action ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); your level + 5 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + your Charisma modifier damage, and the displacer beast slides the target up to 3 squares.

Minor Action ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Effect: The displacer beast shifts up to half its speed.

Minor Action ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Effect: The displacer beast either walks, runs, stands up, squeezes, or crawls.

Immediate Interrupt ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy within 2 squares of the displacer beast makes an attack against you.
Effect: The displacer beast uses its standard action attack against the triggering enemy.

Level 27: Fey Pact Encounter Power

Even the most shadow-tainted of fey creatures retains some of the Feywild's beauty and charm. Your fey patron wants the same adoration and devotion as any other fey lord. But where many members of the Court of Stars offer protection and generosity in return for the supplication of their subjects, your patron sees lesser creatures as worms that should grovel at its feet or be crushed under its boot, should the whim strike. You can tap into this drive and force your enemies to kneel before you as they writhe in the terrible beauty and delicious agony of your presence. This devotion briefly lingers, even after you depart.

Supplication of the Worms Warlock Attack 27

You tug on the hearts of the enemies around you, drawing them closer so that they can kneel before you in adoration.

Encounter ✦ Arcane, Implement, Psychic, Shadow, Teleportation
Standard Action **Close** burst 3
Target: Each enemy in the burst
Attack: Charisma vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + Charisma modifier psychic damage, and you pull the target up to 2 squares and knock it prone.
Miss: The target falls prone.
Fey Pact (Binder): You become invisible and teleport up to your speed. The invisibility lasts until the end of your next turn or until you attack.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, is the tabletop games manager at Wizards of the Coast. His credits for the *Dungeons & Dragons*® game include the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* and the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, *Monster Vault*™, and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™.

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Eye on Dark Sun:
Ur Draxa

By Travis Stout and Rodney Thompson

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Filling the heart of an island whose name has been lost to time, the Valley of Dust and Fire sits like a festering wound. Volcanic ash chokes the air, and an ever-present storm of silt scours anyone foolish enough to try to reach the island's surface. Sightings from a distance have spawned both tales of wonder and tales of horror, because depending on which bard you believe, within the valley lies a city that is either the last refuge of Athas's verdant past, a land of ease and plenty, or a twisted nightmare citadel, the birthplace of the death of the world.

Given the bleak, harsh nature of Athas, it is no surprise that the latter legend is far closer to the truth. Two millennia ago, Ur Draxa, the capital of the island nation of Ebe, was a paradise. The draconic ascension of Borys of Ebe reduced the island to a blasted waste that was haunted by strange elemental spirits. Ur Draxa has become a city of the unquiet dead, her citizens' lives snuffed out to feed the grotesque sorceries that transformed Borys into the Dragon.

The Dragon still lairs in the ruins of Ur Draxa's royal palace, but the city is ruled by the Dead Lords, a cabal of powerful, undead defilers whose minions raid settlements across Athas, bringing back slaves to fuel their dark and terrible magic. On rare occasions, these slaves escape the city and flee into the wilds beyond. Lacking the means to navigate the Great Ash Storm safely, most of these outlanders (called *ka'ardani* in the Draxan language spoken in the City of Doom) end up forming loose tribal bands that struggle to survive in the harsh wilderness of the island of Ebe. By necessity, these tribes are savage, mistrustful of outsiders, and prone to cannibalism.

The Valley of Dust and Fire, and indeed the entirety of the island of Ebe, is one of the most dangerous locales on Athas. Even the mightiest heroes risk their lives by traveling there, and those of lesser stature are almost surely doomed.

The island of Ebe is roughly divided into four concentric regions, each more dangerous than the last. Immediately within the Great Ash Storm lies the Basalt Plain, a barren expanse of lifeless rock. This plain rises into broken, treacherous badlands as a traveler moves inland, only to drop away into the Valley of Dust and Fire. At the nadir of the valley is the Dragon's moat: the Ring of Fire, a sea of lava that surrounds the grim island city of Ur Draxa, where the dead hunger and foul magic is worked by dread sorcerers.

The Great Ash Storm

This eternally raging storm of ash is the first obstacle on the path to Ur Draxa, and it is so formidable that most silt explorers believe it to be a solid, impenetrable mass of roiling, lightning-struck dust. The storm stretches nearly three hundred miles from end to

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end, completely encircling Ebe. Despite the silt skimmers' assertions, it ranges anywhere from three to ten miles thick, forming a shell around the dread island.

While characters are within the Great Ash Storm, they must make Endurance checks (DC 39) once per hour. A character who fails a check loses a healing surge.

The Basalt Plain

This enormous, flat expanse of barren lava covers twenty miles from the "shores" of Ebe to the rim of the Valley of Dust and Fire. The only good thing about the Basalt Plain is that its lack of water and shelter means that no predators roam the region, and the cannibal tribes that live farther inland seldom venture far from their homes. However, the plain still presents a hazard to travelers. Not only is it highly volcanically active and prone to sudden tornadoes, but aerial predators can easily spot travelers and pick them off at leisure. Air drakes (*Dark Sun® Creature Catalog™*) and volcanic drakes (use the ancient volcanic dragon statistics in *Monster Manual® 3*) are common threats.

The Basalt Plain counts as an area of heat and pervasive smoke or ash (see Environmental Dangers, page 158 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide®*). Nature checks to forage for food automatically fail: the plains simply have nothing to forage for.

The Valley of Dust and Fire

The rocky highlands rising from the Basalt Plain drop away suddenly into a vast, bowl-shaped valley that occupies most of the island of Ebe. Although the valley supports marginally more life than the Basalt Plain or the Ring of Fire, eking out an existence here is a daunting prospect. Scattered tribes of savage cannibals, mostly escaped slaves from Ur Draxa (and perhaps a few adventuring bands who were trapped here), roam the blasted landscape, and vicious predators hunt anything that looks edible. Further adding to the peril are the occasional slaving parties sent out by the Dead Lords of Ur Draxa, elemental monstrosities stirred up by the weakening of the primal barrier, and deranged primordial-worshiping cultists.

The environment in the Valley of Dust and Fire is hazardous in the extreme, even more so than the hottest day in the high deserts of Athas. The valley counts as an area of stifling heat, pervasive smoke or ash, and pervasive necromantic energy. Nature checks to forage for food start at a base DC of 39 for one person or DC 40 for up to five people.

The Ring of Fire

At the center of the Valley of Dust and Fire lies a roiling sea of lava known to the outsider tribes as the Ring of Fire (Kaxos Rul in the Draxan language). Completely encircling the island of the City of Doom, the ring spans one hundred fifty miles from north to south and one hundred miles from east to west. It is an awesome spectacle, a boiling river of molten rock that swirls and seethes continuously. In some places, hardy spires of dense stone pierce the lava sea, stretching like black fingers into the red sky. In other places, lava eddies drain in slow, endless whirlpools, reemerging as violent fountains of magma hundreds of feet high. Black cliffs of basalt tower along the shoreline, leading to a precipitous drop to the magma below.

No bridge spans the Ring of Fire, which is at least thirty miles wide from the shore of the Valley of Dust and Fire to the island city of Ur Draxa. The distance makes attempted flight a perilous endeavor. With very few exceptions, those seeking to approach by air will find no place to land if their mounts revolt or their spells fail. Worse, the skies above the magma sea are watched by servants of the Dead Lords, who can rouse the entire city against intruders if necessary.

The Ring of Fire sits very close to portals to the elemental planes, and as such, the lava sea is heavily populated by elemental beings, particularly those with an affinity for fire. For the most part, the Dead Lords leave the elementals to their alien purposes as long as they are not foolish enough to attack the city.

The Ring of Fire counts as an area of stifling heat and pervasive necromantic energy.

Ur Draxa, City of Doom

"A fortress city of unbelievable size and power, Ur Draxa is the true heart of evil and might in the ruined Tyr region. It is the Dragon's citadel, from which the creature ravages all the known world. No [one] can prepare for the power beyond Ur Draxa's cyclopean walls."

—Galek Sandstrider

If a would-be hero survives the Valley of Dust and Fire and finds a way across the Ring of Fire, she arrives at last in Ur Draxa, the City of Doom. Although tales in distant lands claim that a verdant paradise lies at the center of the blasted valley, the reality could not be farther from the truth. Ur Draxa is sheltered from the squabbles that grip the rest of Athas, but it is ruled by the tyrannical Dragon, and its citizens live in fear more of their overseer than of outside invasion.

The mightiest of the city's undead denizens, who were in life the council of high wizards who ruled Ur Draxa in Borys's name, were transformed into *kaisharga*—what on other worlds are known as liches. Now calling themselves the Dead Lords, they pay homage to the Dragon and continue to rule in his name.

The City of Doom is vast beyond the scale of the greatest Athasian city-states. Its walls stand over

UR DRAXA AT A GLANCE

The massive City of Doom is home to an ancient, isolated culture beholden to undead masters and to the Dragon of Athas.

Population: Each sector in Ur Draxa is almost a city-state unto itself. The City of Doom boasts over 120,000 inhabitants, including citizens and slaves. The population is mostly made up of citizens, who are more like nobility as a result of their rigid martial society.

Water: Within the walls of Ur Draxa, water is abundant, largely from wells but also because of a smattering of natural wellsprings in the wooded areas of the city.

Supplies: Obtaining materials from outside Ur Draxa is almost impossible, but the City of Doom's slaves keep most common goods supplied. Foodstuffs and agricultural goods produced inside the city are plentiful, but such items are available only to citizens, not to slaves (who must eat less.

Defense: Ur Draxa's primary defenses are its physical surroundings: the Valley of Dust and Fire, the Ring of Fire, and the towering outer walls. For internal conflicts, the city's army and templars mete out justice when someone violates the city's code.

Inns and Taverns: Ur Draxa has few inns that cater to outsiders, since the city's isolation makes foreign visitors exceedingly rare. However, a small number of luxurious boarding houses in each sector allow visitors from other sectors to stay and do business without having to travel back and forth each day. As a result, almost all the clients of these inns are members of the city's noble citizenry.

seven hundred feet high, and circling the city on foot would take a traveler nearly three days. Those who lay eyes on Ur Draxa often mistake it for a low mountain, so enormous are its proportions. Nine gates ring the city walls, each carved with runes of dire power and grim warning. Each gate leads to a thriving district of the ancient capital of Ebe.

Ur Draxa's Power Structure

"The people of Ur Draxa are born, live, and die in a social system that encourages competition and strife. All their lives, the Draxans try to improve their lot at the expense of their neighbors. This cultural orientation has been carefully instilled in each new generation for centuries. Arts, sciences, and other forms of enlightenment have suffered as military prowess has been selected again and again as the chief virtue of the Draxan society. It is ironic that the Draxans themselves do not grasp their own condition."

—Galek Sandstrider

The people of Ur Draxa live within a rigid martial culture in which most of the population is treated more like landed nobility than like commoners of other cities. As a result, Ur Draxa has a far greater degree of hierarchy differentiation than do most other city-states.

The Dragon and the Dead Lords: At the top of the hierarchy in Ur Draxa sits the Dragon, the undisputed ruler of the city. Obeying the Dragon and carrying out its wishes are the city's undead masters, the Dead Lords.

Templars: Although most of the power lies with the Dead Lords, the City of Doom has a large complement of templars who function as administrators, judges, and bureaucrats. The templars are schooled in the same doctrine as the citizens and are tasked with ensuring that the citizenry maintains its martial spirit.

Viziers: Technically members of the citizenry, the viziers of Ur Draxa have established themselves as well-known psionicists, defilers, and scholars. They form a council body and the faculty of a Draxan university that focuses on preserving historical knowledge. Power-hungry and competitive, many viziers go on to become mighty *kaisharga* in the service of the Dead Lords.

Citizens: Most citizens of Ur Draxa can trace their lineage to the original residents of Ebe before the rise of the Dragon. Draxan citizens act like the nobility of other city-states; they consider themselves above vulgar, menial tasks, and, thanks to common ownership of slaves, can leave such work to their servants and spend time in pursuit of martial or political/social superiority. The citizens are organized into clans, largely grouped by sector, to which they owe allegiance in much the same way that nobles in other cities owe allegiance to their houses.

Army: The City of Doom's army consists of many regiments, each sponsored by one of the various clans. Strictly speaking, all Draxan citizens are considered to be members of the army, but few sustain their participation—the city's isolation lessens the need for a permanent military force. A small number of self-appointed officers and clan leaders form a loose alliance that passes for a military command structure, but the possibility of invasion is so remote that Ur Draxa has no need for anything more organized. The army focuses mostly on internal dangers and pays little vigilance to the threat of outside attack, which might give a small band of heroes a chance to infiltrate without being detected.

Slaves: The Dead Lords toil endlessly to advance their arcane power, but they require living bodies to use as sources of energy for their defiling magic and as subjects for their experiments. Draxan citizens are above such a fate, so the burden falls on the slaves. Many have spent their entire lives in the city (and can trace their lineage back to the slaves of Ebe), and new slaves are brought in all the time from across the Sea of Silt. Some of them have their life energy siphoned

away to fuel epic defiling rituals; their limbs amputated and replaced by grafts from devils, elementals, or pure mystical artifice; or their souls twisted into unnatural expressions of arcane power to serve the ambitions of the Dead Lords. Other slaves are sacrificed in bizarre rituals, their spilled blood used to divine the future or empower forgotten spells. And still other slaves—especially the old, the frail, and the sick, whose life force is deemed too weak to be of use to the Dead Lords—are butchered to provide food for the more useful slaves.

The Dead Lords

For thousands of years, the Dead Lords have served as the chief magistrates and ministers of Ur Draxa. They focus on advancing their own power, administering to their "people" only as much as necessary to ensure an uninterrupted flow of slaves and arcane reagents for their work. Each of the city's ancient districts is ruled by a Dead Lord, who tries to keep its rivals' servants out of its domain. Only the envoys of the Dragon are given free access to all districts. Among the numerous *kaisharga* of the city are the following:

Lord Vizier: Inhabiting the Zuraag sector, the center of the viziers' power, the Lord Vizier is a 26th-level lich and a scholar of what remains of the planes on Athas. The Lord Vizier is closely allied with two Dead Lords of somewhat lower status, the Lord Defiler and the Lord Mental.

Lord Templar: Alone of the Dead Lords, the Lord Templar does not clothe herself in flesh, preferring to remain an insubstantial ghost. Flesh is an illusion, she believes, as evidenced by her experiments warping and twisting living beings into monstrosities. She rules over the templars from the Hall of Administration in the Chuur sector.

Lord Herald: The Lord Herald is little more than a cruel intellect housed in a desiccated skull, but its mastery of psionics and the magic of the mind is unparalleled.

Lord Scribe: A lich of lesser power, the Lord Scribe has abandoned the world of the present in his attempts to understand and learn from the history of Athas.

Lord Warrior: This death knight was once the commander of Ebe's armies. He resides in the Hall of Glory in the Thalak sector, where he leads the army of Ur Draxa. Lacking the arcane inclinations of his fellow Dead Lords, he built an uneasy truce with the Lord Templar—she creates powerful soldiers for his army, and in return he prevents the Lord Herald from turning its full attention to conquering her.

Lord Assassin: This grim, mysterious entity of shadow and cold came into being when the Dragon did. It devotes its studies to the mysteries of death itself, seeking to master the Gray.

DRAXAN CODE OF LAWS

Ur Draxa has little in the way of a legal system. Most disputes are settled via combat in the arena. However, all citizens and slaves of the city are expected to adhere to a code that sets down the Dragon's edicts. The code is as follows:

- Obey the Dragon, the Dead Lords, and the leader of the clan.
- Do not arm a slave, nor allow a slave to believe it is in any way the equal of a Draxan.
- Redress wrongs in the arena. Do not feud.
- Do not betray Ur Draxa to an outsider.
- Do not practice elemental magic.
- Do not hinder the templars. Violators of the code must be punished.
- Never dishonor clan, sector, or city.

Exploring Ur Draxa

Ur Draxa is wildly different from the other city-states of the Tyr region. Although it shares some traits (such as tyrannical rulers, slavery, and rigid caste systems) with other city-states, its size alone makes it more difficult to navigate. Its population is more than double that of the next largest city-state, and its sectors are far from overcrowded. So expansive is Ur Draxa that large swathes of natural terrain—still unspoiled despite the presence of the great defiling Dragon—stand inside the city's walls.

Exploring Ur Draxa isn't like exploring a typical city-state. To put the scale into perspective, each of the nine sectors is as large and complex as any individual city-state of the Tyr region. As a result, moving between the sectors of the City of Doom is like traveling overland. It might take days to reach another sector, and hazards and encounters along the way can slow one's progress or derail a journey entirely.

Slipping into Ur Draxa unnoticed is extremely difficult. Not only are the city's defenses tighter than those of any other on Athas, but the people have become so insular that their language and accent almost can't be recognized as the Common tongue. Still, the city's size can benefit adventurers who wish to sneak inside. Given the large population, Draxans see many strangers every day and are more inclined to chalk up odd behavior and dress to a new fashion from another sector.

The Walls

Surrounding the city is a 720-foot-tall circular wall of solid stone that is etched with magic runes to strengthen it against the ravages of the Valley of Dust and Fire. Inside the city, a second wall of similar size and composition surrounds the Dragon's Sanctum, the fortress-palace at the center of Ur Draxa.

The city is subdivided into nine sectors of equal size, separated by 480-foot-tall stone walls that act as partitions. These walls are overgrown with vines

and moss, and tall staircases with many switchbacks climb to their tops. The tops of the walls are rarely patrolled, but few inhabitants have any reason to climb to such heights.

Outer Gates: Each of the nine sectors has an outer gate that leads into Ur Draxa from the surrounding terrain. Various clan-sponsored military troops alternate performing guard duties at the outer gates of their sectors. At any given time, a garrison of fifty soldiers guards each gate.

Most of the time, each gate is sealed by a great black stone. At the psionic command of one of the Dead Lords (or one of their designated servants), a stone can phase into nothingness, granting entrance to (or exit from) the city.

It's also possible that a psionic attack of sufficient power can force a gate to open. As a standard action, a character can spend 1 power point to make an attack against a gate that is within 20 squares of him or her. The character must use a psionic attack power that targets Will, and if the attack hits the gate's Will (35), the gate opens for 1 minute; all other effects of the attack are ignored. Opening a gate in this manner instantaneously sends a telepathic warning to the Dead Lord responsible for that gate's security.

Boulevard Gates: In the lower walls that partition the city are the boulevard gates—smaller versions of the outer gates that restrict passage between sectors. Most of the time, the boulevard gates are left open for travelers. If a gate is closed (which typically happens only when there is a dangerous situation in an adjoining sector), a character can try to open it psionically, using the same method for opening the outer gates.

The Nine Sectors

Each of the nine sectors of the city, known as the *kardans* to the inhabitants, has its own unique culture, leader, and environment. The sectors have small towns, urban environments, roads, and lush natural

terrain not seen elsewhere on Athas. Even though Ur Draxa is filled with defilers (including the Dragon, the greatest defiler of all), those individuals' behavior is limited by the city's need for natural land to produce food and other agricultural products and the citizens' desire for luxury.

Arena: Each sector has its own gladiatorial arenas. Within these arenas, duels take place to settle disputes and matters of honor. The arenas vary in form based on the culture of the sector in which they appear, but they all abide by similar rules.

At any time, for any reason, any Draxan can demand the right (known as the *kaidar*) to face another in the arena. The challenged party has the right to state the conditions and the weapons—for example, to the death with maces, or to a surrender with psionics. The challenger can propose an alternative weapon, and if the challenged party refuses that counteroffer, the fight takes place barehanded.

The duel is fought in a ring that measures twelve paces across. After the duel has begun, leaving the ring prematurely means death—the spectators ensure that the duel is resolved before either party leaves.

During the *kaidar*, almost anything goes—psionic or magical attacks, throwing sand in the face of your opponent, feigning death to lure your foe in for an easy strike, and more. The only rule forbids the concealment of secret weapons, such as a dagger in the boot, because the weapons of the match are agreed upon before the duel.

Other than preventing the duelists from leaving the arena early or using concealed weapons, no one outside the ring can interfere with a duel for any reason.

Boulevard of Heroes: Located in the Ulth sector, the Boulevard of Heroes is a grand thoroughfare lined with the statues of the greatest Draxan warriors. Almost 1,300 sculptures line the road leading from the outer gate to the center of the city, and only a small number of statues are added in any given citizen's lifetime. The residents of Ulth look upon the statues with pride, and many citizens of Ur Draxa aspire to have their visage added to the line of revered sculptures.

Jezelred: The slave village of Jezelred, found in the Xairas sector, typifies life for most slaves in the City of Doom. The village is small, with a population of only 300, many of whom leave their homes each day to attend the needs of their masters. Although the village is sponsored and supported by Clan Xairas, its residents live only to serve the will of the citizens of Ur Draxa. Some of the slaves remain in Jezelred during the day to produce crafted handiwork, but many are snatched away by Draxan citizens in need of day labor. Slaves cannot refuse such tasks.

Forest of Gulidnay: Most of the Gulidnay sector is taken up by a forest that has been deliberately allowed to grow wild without any tending or oversight. As a result, much of the sector resembles a game preserve, where wild and dangerous animals (such as those found in the Forest Ridge) run free. Venturing into the forest of Gulidnay is like entering the most dangerous wild parts of the Ringing Mountains.

Hall of Administration: The Hall of Administration in the Chuur sector is a fortress of interconnected buildings that houses the hierarchy of the templars in Ur Draxa. In many ways, the compound mirrors the palaces of the sorcerer-kings elsewhere on Athas, providing housing and resources for the Draxan templars. Although templars live in all sectors of the city, the Hall of Administration is the central hub where they convene to discuss matters of importance.

Lake Blackwater: A foreboding body of water in the middle of the Raxes sector, Lake Blackwater is still and shadowy. The water is clean and safe to drink, but it looks dark and cloudy; perhaps some vestige of the city's tyranny keeps the lake from stirring and appearing fresh. Several bridges cross Lake Blackwater, connecting various boulevards coming from different corners of the sector. The lake is probably the largest body of fresh water remaining on Athas.

Nethelred: A slave village in the Morzket sector, Nethelred is still recovering from the harsh reprisals of a slave uprising that occurred three years ago. The population of the village is a mere 250, down from 1,000 before the uprising, and those who remain simmer at the devastation brought upon them and fear further reprisals from the templars and Dead Lords. The seeds of another rebellion might be buried deep, but if there is a place where sedition can grow once again, it is Nethelred.

Hall of Learning: A sprawling city-within-a-city in the Zuraag sector, the Hall of Learning is the central storehouse of all the knowledge collected over the years by the viziers. Much like a university, the hall is a place where viziers and other citizens can learn the history of Ur Draxa and what is known about Athas in general. Unlike many other city-states, the rulers of Ur Draxa have not outlawed reading and writing. Indeed, they allow the viziers to accumulate great knowledge that would be destroyed or confiscated by templars elsewhere in the world.

Hall of Glory: Located in the Thalak sector, the Hall of Glory is a fortress that serves as the headquarters for the army of Ur Draxa. The loose alliance of self-appointed officers meets here to agree upon any actions that need to be taken, and the grounds hold many areas for the training and education of slave warriors and citizen officers. Additionally, clan members responsible for overseeing the sponsored garrisons of their sectors convene in the Hall of Glory to exchange information and earn new allies.

Ruins of Numel: The Numel sector is a shadow of its former self. The sector is almost completely abandoned, a result of the largest slave uprising in the history of the City of Doom and the subsequent reprisals. Citizen homes, noble palaces, and slave villages are nearly empty and being reclaimed by the

overgrowth that has spread throughout the sector. Numel is one part reminder of the price of rebellion, one part verdant jungle, and one part abandoned city. Inside, the riches of its former residents await discovery.

The Dragon's Sanctum

At the heart of the city is the Dragon's lair, warded with deadly magic that only the Dragon or a Dead Lord can bypass. Once known as the Royal Palace of Ebe, the citadel has been almost entirely demolished. The Dragon gutted entire wings to create laboratories, ritual rooms, libraries, and living areas suitable for its immense bulk. Deadly arcane and psionic traps fill the palace, and the Dragon's personal servants (*kaisharga*, bound elementals, and a small, fanatically loyal corps of templars) patrol for intruders. These servants are vigilant and alert, for they know that as much as the Dead Lords fear the Dragon, each lord is desperate for the arcane knowledge contained within the citadel.

In the center of the sanctum, in what was once the throne room of Borys—in fact, precisely upon the spot where the King of Ebe became the Dragon—an immense, featureless sphere of pure blackness hangs in the air. The sphere reflects no light and seems to be utterly devoid of imperfection or flaw. Although this mysterious orb acts as a sphere of annihilation, it is much more. Bound within this prison of nothingness is the War-Bringer, Rajaat, who was trapped inside by his own generals at the end of the Cleansing War. Does the Dragon keep the sphere here to guard it, to seek a way to destroy it, or to open it? Only that ancient beast's alien and terrible mind knows the truth.

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Travis Stout is a freelance game designer who also worked on *Fallout: New Vegas* as a writer, developer, and area designer for Obsidian Entertainment.

Rodney Thompson, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee, is the tabletop games manager at Wizards of the Coast. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* and the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, *Monster Vault*™, and *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™.

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EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

The Trust

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Chad King

Tragedy struck at the Korranberg Grand Opera tonight as beloved tenor Ilan d'Thuranni fell prey to a sudden stroke. This news is only the beginning of what promises to be a fascinating story; evidence suggests that Lord Ilan had been leading a double life as a highly paid assassin. If there is any truth to these rumors, we can count ourselves lucky that Ilan succumbed to this malady before his private performance for the Korranberg Nine! Reached for comment in Regalport, Baron Elar d'Thuranni expressed shock and sorrow that his cousin could be involved in any sort of criminal undertaking. Let us mourn with the House of Shadows and trust that this incident will be the end of their recent string of misfortunes.

—From the *Korranberg Chronicle,* 14 Barrakas 988 YK

The homeland of the gnomes is a joyful place. The streets are decked with flowers, and the air is filled with laughter and song. Ghost weavers craft entrancing patterns of light and shadow, and bards compete in duels of wit and words. It's rare to see gnomes carrying weapons, even among the wardens who are supposed to uphold the law but primarily serve as mediators in domestic disputes and tour guides for foreigners. To the casual thief, a Zil city seems like a ripe fruit waiting to be plucked. Yet the *Korranberg Chronicle* includes many stories like the one above. Crime is largely unknown in Zilargo because criminals have an unnerving tendency to die before they put their plans into action. Guarding the Zil people is the role of the Trust, an invisible fraternity that watches from the shadows. Ask any Zil gnome, and she will tell you that the Trust is always watching, that no whisper escapes its ears and no malefactor escapes justice at its hands. What is the truth behind the Trust? How far does its reach extend, and what role can it play in a campaign?

The Honor Guard

The gnomes of Zilargo trace their roots to the tricksters of Thelanis, and the power of illusion lingers in their blood. Deception is second nature to gnomes, and the history of their city-states is rife with intrigue and vendettas. Zilargo was formed to unite the gnomes in the face of the growing influence of the Dragonmarked Houses and the rising threat of Galifar. But how could the great city-states trust one another? Given their history, what assurances could Trolanport offer to suspicious Zolanberg?

The Trust was the brainchild of an old gnome whose name has been stolen from history; today she

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is known only as the Proctor. The Library of Korranberg had long served as a home to gnomes from all cities and families, and they had already faced the problem of establishing trust among city-states. The Proctor countered the threat with a secret corps pledged to enforce the honor code of the library and keep personal feuds from spilling over into the public realm. She proposed to use this corps as the foundation of a wider organization that would span the newborn nation.

At least a dozen accounts describe the meeting at which she made her fateful announcement. In some the Proctor discusses the methods she used to recruit her corps—how she found those who could see the library as a family greater than their own flesh and blood. In other accounts, the Proctor blackmails the Triumvirs and forces them to give her the resources that she needs. Whatever the truth of the matter, two years after Zilargo was founded, a pamphlet distributed across the nation announced the existence of the Trust and the role it would play in the days to come. This tract lauded the shared virtues of the Zil: ingenuity, curiosity, love of family, and the ability to overcome adversity through wit and wisdom. The pamphlet acknowledged that friendly competition between neighbors is the whetstone that keeps wits sharp. Competition would be accepted, but crime would not. However, the precise definition of crime was vague. The tract ended with these words:

"*To those who follow the proper path, we shall be as invisible as any ghost. Trust that we have your best interests at heart. Trust that we will act only when we must. Trust that we will always look after the needs of our great family, and that we need your aid as much as you need ours.*"

Records of the period that followed are murky. Most gnomes would have you believe that the Zil embraced the Trust with open arms, but a sage who delves deeply will find a remarkable number of curious deaths in the following decade. No records exist of any family openly challenging the Trust or seceding from the Zil union. Most likely, the Proctor waited to make the announcement until she was sure that she had a sufficient number of agents in the major families—people who would steer public opinion in the proper direction.

Regardless of any doubts that might have existed when the organization was founded, modern gnomes wholeheartedly embrace the Trust. Most Brelish are shocked by the group's ruthless summary justice, questioning how anyone could accept a system that is willing to kill a person before he or she commits a crime. The typical Zil responds that such doubts are understandable in a system where the forces of law and order are corrupt and inefficient. Agents of the Trust care only for the good of the nation, and a corrupt hand would be eliminated by the fraternity itself. The people of the Five Nations simply can't understand how much information the Trust has in its hands. The group doesn't make mistakes. And if somehow it did—or for that matter, if an innocent had to die for the good of the multitude—that is a price the Zil are willing to pay. The gnomes firmly believe that those who do nothing wrong have nothing to fear from the Trust. Most foreigners envision Zilargo as a place where people live in fear, but the opposite is true. The Zil know exactly how much they can get away with, what intrigues are allowed, and what behavior crosses the line. At the end of the day, most Zil truly have faith in the Trust.

The other side of the coin that the Brelish can't see is the degree to which the Zil love intrigue. For the people of the Five Nations, the thought that anyone around you—even your friend or lover—could be an assassin is a quick path to paranoia and madness. For the gnomes, it's a glorious game. Trying to identify Trust agents and coming up with schemes that can slip by the group's omniscient eyes are favorite pastimes of Zil children. The gnomes take pride in their peaceful society, but they also love to dream of ways to outwit their guardians.

Tools of the Trust

The Trust's power comes from numerous sources. One is the sheer number of informants at the organization's disposal. The King's Citadel of Breland estimates that as many as one in three Zil gnomes serve as ears of the Trust. Although most of them are simple observers, a significant number of sleeper agents can be called into active service as required. Some spies are recruited at the university, whereas others are born into the work. The informants know little about the overall structure of the organization, and one agent might unwittingly report on the suspicious activities of another. It's up to the provosts and the current Proctor to sift through all the data to create a clear picture. If a criminal identifies and eliminates an agent of the Trust, another agent or team in the same area might be called into play.

The weapons in the Trust's arsenal speak to the gnomish roots of the organization. The Zil are known for their love of language and their gifts for illusion, alchemy, and elemental binding. Over the centuries, the Trust has developed four unique languages, along with innumerable codes, ciphers, and other ways to deliver secret messages. A typical observer knows only one of these secret languages, which he uses when dealing with his handler; a provost might know all four. Agents use arcane marks to pass information or provide intelligence about the local area. Illusion is used in many ways, including invisibility, concealment, disguise, and distraction. Observers hone their innate talent for *ghost sound*, which can be used to deliver messages to a contact, coordinate an assassination, or deliver a warning to a criminal who might be dissuaded by a good scare.

The most remarkable tool employed by the Trust is the *whisper bond*. This technique binds a minor air elemental, known as a whisp, to the agent. A gnome who masters the bond can extend his senses

into his spiritual partner. Whisps serve as spies and swift flying couriers, and they can deliver messages across long distances; one can also capture sound and reproduce it for its master. Whisps are weak spirits and easily dispersed if exposed, but they are small, stealthy and invisible—little more than a faint gust of wind—and eventually re-form if destroyed.

Poison is the Trust's favorite weapon, and the group has a dedicated corps of alchemists that has spent centuries devising new toxins. Contact, ingested, and inhaled poisons are common, along with more complex toxins—venoms that take effect only when two components are mixed or when an otherwise harmless substance serves as a catalyst. The poisons employed by the assassin class are good models for the tools of the Trust, but other toxins can be employed as necessary. Although the Zil abhor physical violence, the Trust has a force of silent killers trained to slay with darts and daggers. A rumor claims that the Trust maintains ghost agents in all the major cities of Khorvaire. These assassins live shrouded in invisibility and communicate solely through whisps and *sending*, waiting for orders to strike.

Despite these impressive forces, the Trust's most formidable weapon might be its reputation. The myth of the fraternity's omnipotence is greater than the reality, but few people take the chance. Imagine a group of adventurers plotting a theft when they hear a ghostly warning: "Abandon this course of action before it is too late." It could be a spectral assassin waiting to strike; the innkeeper, ready to poison their next round of drinks; or simply an observer, stirring up doubts and fears. Who's willing to take the risk? Contrary to popular belief, the Trust isn't obsessed with killing all wrongdoers. If a crime can be averted by frightening away the would-be culprits, so much the better.

Adventure Hooks

The Trust is strongest in its home base of Zilargo, but its agents—gnomes, elementals, and others—have spread across Khorvaire. They monitor possible threats to Zilargo that grow beyond the nation's borders. However, just as agents won't kill a potential criminal if they can scare him or her away, they rarely interfere in the affairs of the wider world. A secret becomes less valuable as more people know it, and the Trust values secrecy above gold.

If adventurers are determined to do something forbidden in the Land of the Wise, they must find a way to outwit the Trust. Here are a few ideas to consider.

Stalking Horses: Although the characters don't know it, the Proctor is using them to expose and eliminate a branch of the Trust that has been compromised by the Aurum. The adventurers' apparent victory over the Trust is a test that draws them deeper into the web. A gnome character might be recruited directly into the organization; other adventurers are kept at arm's length.

Masters of Whispers: House Sivis has supported the Trust since the organization was created, and a number of foundlings with the Mark of Scribing belong to the group. The adventurers discover evidence that the current Proctor is a Sivis lord and that House Sivis has secretly controlled the Trust for centuries. What does the house want? Is it just looking out for the Zil people, or is it using the power of the Trust to pursue its own mercantile agenda? Can the adventurers break the Trust away from Sivis without shattering this pillar of Zilargo?

The Hoard of Secrets: The Trust has been gathering information from across Khorvaire for hundreds of years. The adventurers need a piece of information known only to the Proctor. But how do they find the most secretive member of this hidden empire, and what must they offer in exchange for the priceless knowledge they seek?

Shadows Versus Whispers: Over the ages, House Phiarlan and House Thuranni have lost some of their finest agents at the hands of the Trust. Now one of the Shadow Houses is out for revenge. Assassins face off on the streets of the Five Nations' greatest cities. Which side will the adventurers take? If they refuse to become involved, how far will the conflict escalate?

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron® campaign setting and designer of the card game *Gloom*. He was last seen at a lecture at the Library of Korranberg entitled "The Trust: Threat or Menace?" Anyone with knowledge of his whereabouts should contact Larrian ir'Morgrave at Lareth Hall in Sharn.

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S Eye on the Realms

Xraunrarr Shall Triumph

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by S.C. Watson

Xraunrarr shall endure. Xraunrarr shall triumph. Xraunrarr shall remain hidden, and all who learn too much about Xraunrarr shall be silenced. Hive mothers are oppressors, and lone tyrants are fools that waste the talents of we Greater Ones. The Cause is rightful; it offers a way upward rather than merely onward. Together, Xraunrans are mighty and find fulfillment. Divided, we become lesser. Cleave to the Cause, and triumph.

In human legends—and in the endless stream of horrific tavern tales that continually rekindle and add to those legends—beholders are usually solitary creatures that lurk in caverns, ruins, or the deep places of the world, floating above the heaped bones of their victims.

Sometimes it's said that a beholder parent makes its children serve as slaves, guards, and spies, or that slaying a beholder alerts others to travel to avenge their fallen comrade. A few stories tell of death tyrants—rotting, undead beholders that are skeletal or partly spectral—bound in service to a living giant beholder master. There are even tales of beholder archmages that can hurl spells mighty enough to humble the greatest human wizards.

Yet few legends stray near the truth: that although there is a strong desire in the psyche of the eye tyrant to be obedient to no one, some beholders live in nations, forming fellowships as powerful as those of humanoid races. Not all these creatures are coerced followers of a hive mother, a mighty overmind, or an elder orb. Some collaborate of their own free will, standing together against outside forces even as they continue to nurse petty rivalries. Most of these bands or tribes lurk in hiding rather than rule territories openly. Most . . . but not all.

This tale is of one such fellowship: Xraunrarr ("Zzz-*rawn*-rar"), named for its long-dead founder. Once, Xraunrarr was a surface realm of more than a thousand beholders that publicly ruled the then-larger Hullack Forest in eastern Cormyr. Most

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humans, if they have heard of these beholders at all, dimly recall that the creatures were destroyed long ago by the druid Hullack.

The truth is somewhat different. The Xraunran beholders suffered losses and setbacks, but they were not defeated so much as they chose to relinquish open rule in favor of going into hiding and flourishing behind the scenes.

As Elminster sees it, they learned the lesson that "to found or claim a throne is to be tied to it, to be a target easily found by all, to be forced ever to guard and defend. One ceases to dominate, conquer, and live freely, and—once challenged or even threatened—becomes a defender. That role disgusted and irritated the Xraunran tyrants, so they renounced it and sought the shadows, where they could lurk and begin to truly live again."

These beholders live yet, and they are closer than most Cormyreans think.

The Rise and Fall of Xraunrarr

Beholders care nothing for human calendars or viewpoints, and the Xraunran beholders largely escaped the notice of other sentient races until recently, so determining the precise dates of events concerning the realm is difficult. However, the sequence of events has been revealed and pieced together over the years by Harpers; elves interested in the areas now known as Cormyr, the Dales, and Sembia; and certain Chosen of Mystra (notably Elminster of Shadowdale). The events can be summarized as follows.

More than a thousand years before the Spellplague, a great beholder war raged in the Underdark, with most of the fighting occurring somewhere beneath the Eastern Shaar (or still farther east). Two tribes or clans of beholders fought as dueling hive mothers forced their dominated eye tyrants to do battle. Meanwhile, several independent, younger hive mothers that had been outcasts in the Upperdark (having survived by fleeing their homes before they could be devoured by their horrified parents) tried to take advantage of the strife and steal the minds of some spheres-of-eyes to found their own new hives.

One such hive mother was Xraunrarr, who conquered the wills of between twelve and twenty eye tyrants, pouncing on warrior bands as they advanced through the caverns. Xraunrarr and its subjects traveled far through the Underdark, eventually coming to the part now known as the Deep Wastes. Rather than slaughtering the drow that were developing surface connections near what is now Shadowdale or the drow conquering the Upperdark below what is now southwestern Cormyr, Xraunrarr decided it was more prudent to remain hidden from organized, sentient subterranean races for a time.

Wary and patient by nature, Xraunrarr led its band of dominated beholders up into the caverns that riddle the mountains now called the Thunder Peaks, which divide the present-day realms of Cormyr and Sembia. They swiftly exterminated the area's goblins and hobgoblins, but they left dragon lairs untouched, deeming dragons a great deterrent to other intruders. Thus, the realm of Xraunrarr was founded.

For centuries the hive slowly grew in numbers, knowledge of the world, and cohesion. Xraunrarr believed in teamwork, paranoid caution, covert surveillance of the surroundings, and staying hidden until the timing was right. The hive harvested prey in ways that left no survivors to report the existence of the Xraunrans to others.

The eye tyrants of Xraunrarr remained a small, disciplined hive that kept to the Upperdark within the Thunder Peaks, but they coveted all the caverns beneath what is today Cormyr. The creatures mounted many spying forays out of their caverns, and when they determined that conditions were favorable, they attacked weak or elderly sleeping dragons, or they launched smite-and-run raids on local surface elves and drow to keep them from expanding into the caverns and possibly discovering Xraunrarr.

As the years passed, the power of the local dragons waned, and the might of the local elves faded. Continuing their spying forays, the eye tyrants saw humans come to the land.

Xraunrarr was as paranoid and filled with the need to dominate lesser beings as was any other beholder, but it was far more calculating and patient than most of its kind—and far less blinded by a racial sense of superiority. It saw the potential of humans and decided that farming them, much as humans herded cattle, was the future for the hive—a philosophy that came to be known as the Cause.

In preparation for capturing a breeding herd of humans, Xraunrarr directed its beholders to cautiously come to the surface in the depths of the Hullack Forest (which was not then a separate woodland, but rather the eastern, wild part of what is now called the King's Forest in northern Cormyr). There they learned the perils of the forest, hunted beasts and plants for experiments, and took to farming the woods. As human woodcutters began to make inroads into the forest, the Xraunrans placed monsters as guardians to keep the intruders away. Still, the beholders themselves stole forth from time to time to take human captives for their herd.

Eventually, Hullack, a druid of Eldath, came to the Xraunran-dominated depths of the forest. A wise man, slow to wrath, Hullack was aghast to discover the beholders. Upon learning more about their strength and their activities, he called up the forest against them, allying with local elves and enlisting dryads, treants, satyrs, and many woodland beasts to bolster the servants of Eldath he commanded.

The Crown of Cormyr nominally supported Hullack and sent a score of knights to serve as his bodyguards, but did nothing more. The senior courtiers of the day did not want to risk having a strong druid lord in northeastern Cormyr who might

hamper the clearing and settlement of the woodland—and whom Sembia or the "undercloak" rebels of Arabel and Marsember could subvert. (Then as now in Cormyr, the term "undercloak" meant not openly treasonous at the moment, but biding one's time to be; in this case, it meant those who resented Obarskyr rule and were awaiting a chance to rise in arms against the Dragon Throne.) The knights were secretly instructed to observe Hullack and the foe he opposed and to report back.

Hullack's battle with the eye tyrants was brief, fierce, and one-sided, the beholders slaughtering the druid's forces almost at will. And then everything changed when a traitor struck down Xraunrarr.

The Traitor Tyrant

Most beholders destroy others of their kind that they deem to be threats, but Xraunrarr was different. It saw the need for beholders with formidable spellcasting powers and encouraged some of its dominated Xraunrans to become beholder mages. More than that, it compelled these mages to share any spells and magic items the hive gained from its raids and forays, and it ordered them to enchant slain Xraunrans as undead (the sort of beholders that humans call "death tyrants") to serve as guardians and flying battle-shields when the hive went to war.

Any mind that scries a beholder mage or tries to dominate it as the mage casts spells and experiments with magic becomes wearied, shaken, and nauseated. In most cases, the observing beholder can endure, maintain contact, and prevail. But during the battle with Hullack, Xraunrarr was trying to watch over and control the minds of many beholders. (According to Xargaul, then a young, largely untrained Xraunran, the hive was several hundred strong when it fought the druid.) To lessen the overwhelming mental load, Xraunrarr withdrew from the most active spellcasting minds for brief periods.

Few beholder mages failed to notice these moments of freedom, but only one mage exploited them. (The rest preferred the relative stability and security of the hive, dared not defy Xraunrarr, or could not decide what to do with their fleeting periods of independence.) That lone beholder mage, a brilliant young Xraunran named Uldeeth, saw a magical way to send a massive flood of spell-spawned lightning down the mental link back to the hive mother. Uldeeth spent each moment of its next several dozen periods of mind-freedom perfecting and readying the "slaying bolts" spell.

At the height of the battle against Hullack, with Xraunrarr coldly and precisely directing its forces, Uldeeth waited until the hive mother was coercing more than two score Xraunrans at once, maintaining only the lightest mental contact with the mages as they hurled their war spells. At that moment, the traitor unleashed its slaying bolts.

Xraunrarr was cooked from within and burst in a spectacular death that left all the directly coerced beholders stunned or mind-ruined. The rest were momentarily bewildered as they were abruptly freed from dominance. Chaos governed their behavior for a brief, wild period, and then they all vanished.

Hullack's forces, greatly reduced from the fighting, suddenly faced only the few drifting, erratic beholders that had been stunned or mind-ruined by the hive mother's death. These they slew easily, but of the other beholders, they could find no trace. They searched the woods and, with some trepidation, the beholder tunnels. Not a single lurking sphere with eyestalks was found.

Hullack had the tunnels sealed off and later raised the Wyvernstones on the site. The eye tyrants had been vanquished, the beholder realm destroyed.

The Doom of Uldeeth

Well, not really.

Xraunrarr was indeed no more, but most of the Xraunrans were very much alive. They fled the battlefield, heading north as fast as they could, not so much to get away from Hullack's forces as to escape from Uldeeth's spells. After killing the hive mother, the traitor had started using its slaying bolts to destroy its fellow mages. With Xraunrarr dead, Uldeeth was determined to become the new ruler of the hive.

Xargaul believes that some of the eldest Xraunrans went north because they had previously discovered old, fell magic there, and they wanted to lure Uldeeth to its doom. (Elminster warns that Xargaul's claims are second only to its memories in unreliability, but he agrees that the beholders did seem to know of something magical that would humble their would-be conqueror.) Whatever it was, the magic was consumed in the process of defeating Uldeeth, whose bid to rule the Xraunrans proved short-lived.

The traitor's power was broken, and the creature passed into a unique, poorly understood form of undeath. Today, Uldeeth is now a swarm of disembodied, independently flying spectral eyes that can fade in and out of visibility at will. Each eyeball trails a short tail of tattered flesh and can communicate through a voice heard in the listener's mind.

Uldeeth spends most of its time in a deathless state similar to sleep. It "awakens" whenever a wizard, a sorcerer, a warlock, or some creature carrying magic items comes near, and it begins to follow that creature at a distance. Uldeeth reveals itself if it finds an arcane spellcaster alone or in the company of other beings who are asleep, wounded, or sitting apart. It reveals itself instantly if it encounters more than one arcane spellcaster together.

Uldeeth speaks directly into the minds of the spellcasters, pleading with them—in burbling,

desperate, rasping Common—to cast this or that spell on one of its eyes. Uldeeth invokes any deity it suspects the target venerates or any loyalty it recognizes by badge, holy symbol, or device worn or carried by the target or companions of the target. Uldeeth swears that its "rescue" is something the deity, authority, or cause demands or uses to test the worthy.

Each time a spell is cast that targets one of Uldeeth's eyes, it counts as one "step" toward restoring the creature to being a whole beholder again. Fully restoring Uldeeth requires 3,033 such steps (it has gained only twenty thus far).

To this day, Uldeeth's swarm of spectral eyes roams corners, woodland glades, and dells after dark in Cormyr, looking to coerce wizards, sorcerers, and warlocks into moving it one step closer to life again. Now deeply insane, it believes that the Great Mother (or some other deity) kept it alive for an important purpose, and that if it can regain its body, its mage powers will return, and it can start fulfilling its destiny—which the deity will reveal only then

A character who has previously seen a dead or immobilized beholder recognizes what Uldeeth was. By making a DC 14 Arcana check, Dungeoneering check, or History check, the character knows that a restored Uldeeth would be a spellcasting, mind-controlling tyrant.

A New Vision

With Uldeeth destroyed and the hive mother's domination ended, the surviving Xraunran beholders met in a conclave. There they decided something utterly new for a group of eye tyrants in Faerûn.

They would live not under a single ruler but according to decisions made by regular conclaves of their elders. They would not conquer and despoil territory but instead would farm lesser beings for food, labor, and goods. The beholders came to agree with what Xraunrarr had believed: that humans were the most ingenious, creative, and adaptable sentient race in the world.

Henceforth, the Xraunrans began watching over their personal collections of humans, benefiting from human strivings and innovations, and taking personal satisfaction from the accomplishments of "their" humans—not to mention gaining prestige and influence among their fellow beholders. (As Xargaul explained to Elminster, "You have breeders of cattle who take pride in their work and vie with their rivals. We do the same, but humans are our cattle.")

Among the Xraunrans, it's universally held that humans are worthless when penned, chained, and overtly enslaved. For humans to have utility, they must believe that they are free (or, at least, oppressed only by their own kind and by difficult circumstances rather than by other creatures). Only then will humans strive and innovate, and only then will Xraunrans harness the benefits.

Scattering into small groups after the conclave, the Xraunrans established surface holds in the lairs of dragons they had defeated in the Stonelands, the Storm Horns, and the Thunder Peaks mountain ranges. In the years since, few other creatures have dared to approach these lairs, and most that did were orc raiders, hungry monsters (which were devoured or enslaved), or capable adventurers (who made very useful puppets after their minds were controlled).

Xraunrans Today

In Cormyr, Xraunrans communicate among themselves, moving through the Upperdark or flying by night. They avoid the War Wizards, melting into the Stonelands or mountain caverns to avoid confrontations, doing nothing to draw attention. They raid fairly often to snatch isolated humans to add to their captive breeding herds (though dangerous or rebellious individuals are eaten), go out on spying forays all the time, and lurk patiently—for that was the way of Xraunrarr. In fact, these eye tyrants think of themselves as "the realm of Xraunrarr" to distinguish themselves from other beholders.

All beholders hate and fear those who pose serious threats to them. Traditionally, to the eye tyrants of Faerûn, these greater foes include dragons and malaugryms. Most beholders view mind flayers as lesser foes that yet remain formidable due to their numbers and persistence.

Of more immediate concern to Xraunrans, however, are magically powerful, ambitious, socially dominant forces of all sorts. At present, the Shadovar and Szass Tam are the two most prominent. Accordingly, these foes must be thwarted at every turn, weakened, and ultimately destroyed.

The Cause

The Cause of Xraunrarr is all about an easier life for Xraunrans, which can be accomplished by steering humans to unwittingly benefit (and serve) them. To further this aim, the Xraunran beholders covertly choose which human rulers to support, which to work against, and which to overthrow. Although they have coldly fierce debates over the details of how to follow the Cause, the beholders have agreed thus far on the general shape and direction of their doctrine.

All surviving Xraunran beholder mages have sworn not to use their magic against any Xraunran unless either they are directed to do so by a conclave, they must defend themselves from attack, or they must destroy a beholder that tries to compel and dominate others in the manner of a hive mother.

Crowns of Eyes

The Xraunrans succeed through subtlety. They don't enthrall anyone and can't control the actions of a coerced creature in real time. Rather, they shift a creature's attitudes toward others and put certain urges and ideas into its mind. Usually, given the danger to a beholder mage that tries to remain near

a human in Cormyrean society, the coercion is done at a distance by means of magic that works through small worn or carried trinkets.

Most famously, these include *crowns of eyes*, beautiful metal circlets that contain enspelled cabochon gems (the "eyes"). They were fashioned in this form so as to be kept and prized. However, a handful of the smooth, oval gems have been lost over the years, and a few more are locked in the dusty vaults of various nobles, waiting to be discovered.

Making a *crown of eyes* consumes at least two smaller eyes (the real kind) from the stalks of a living or recently slain beholder.

Here are examples of imparted ideas or statements.

- "Glaeron is a traitor."
- "Why not ally with Lord Droun?"
- "The king will never grant it to me; better to take it."
- "Wizards can't be trusted; I must not confide in Orlel."

Xraunran Crown of Eyes Epic Level

Once you are linked to this cabochon-adorned metal circlet, your mind can access the eyes and ears of any wearer and attempt to influence the wearer's mind.

Artifact: Head slot item

Property

You can see and hear what the crown's wearer sees and hears. This does not allow you to control the wearer's head, the direction it faces, or its movements; the wearer's field of view and range of hearing limit yours. When the crown is not being worn, you can see and hear out of it as if you were gazing at any angle from any of its gems.

Attack Power (Charm) ✦ **Daily** (Standard Action)

Attack: Ranged unlimited on the same plane (the crown's wearer); your level + 3 vs. Will

Hit: You impart an emotion or an idea to the wearer. The emotion can have an image attached (such as of a particular person, a type of creature, an item, or a place), and the idea (whether true or false) must be expressed as a single sentence in a language understood by the wearer.

This power is most effective when the wearer is praying or asleep and dreaming. The wearer typically believes that the idea or statement was imparted by a deity, an ancestor, a haunting, or its own subconscious. Regardless, the crown of eyes does not control the decisions or actions of the wearer, who is free to respond as desired.

- "Lord Vorlsummer will be a true friend; listen to him."
- "They are after me; I should flee to the Stonelands right now."

The Crowned Coerced

Elminster believes it would take decades of diligent sleuthing to uncover the identities of the humans the Xraunrans have directly coerced over the years—not to mention the hundreds more they secretly manipulated, thwarted, or aided. Such investigations are of interest mostly to sages of history; the current tools of Xraunrarr are of more practical import.

The beholders regularly manipulate about a dozen unwitting humans scattered throughout the Forest Kingdom, notably half a dozen in Arabel. Not only have the Xraunrans maintained their influence for centuries, but they've done it skillfully enough to elude the notice of Vangerdahast, Caladnei, or anyone else except two or three Harpers (and now, Elminster).

The Xraunrans work their cattle to further three aims. First, they want to keep the Obarskyrs on the Dragon Throne but facing restless groups of discontented nobles who hate each other more than they hate the royals, ensuring that they all work small treacheries and never unite in rebellion. Second, the beholders want adventurers to keep going on expeditions into the Stonelands in search of riches that are the subject of endless rumors (thus giving the Xraunrans a steady stream of breeding captives and magic). And third, the eye tyrants want to keep trade flowing freely into and out of Cormyr, which prevents open, all-out war between that nation and Sembia or any other neighbor.

Sometimes the Xraunrans employ spell-controlled darkmantles as spies. These small creatures, no larger than a human head, are sent to lurk in the dark ceiling corners of castles, cellars, and caverns, where they occupy strategic vantage points so that distant beholder mages can see and hear through them.

Thus far, Elminster has concerned himself only with Xraunran coercion in the Dales and Cormyr. "Sembia," he mutters darkly, "is an investigation that requires the full attention of six Elminsters—stupendously wealthy ones, who don't mind noise, crowding, decadent excess, and the ever-present stink of greed."

He has learned that in the Year of the Ageless One, the Xraunrans have used *crowns of eyes* or other magic items to coerce two ambitious merchants on the rise, one high-ranking courtier, one wealthy young noble, and most of another noble family.

One of the up-and-coming traders is an urbane, clever shipper in Suzail—the short, rather homely Velshond Marshfall of Dundown Street ("Discreet and swift imports and exports—all nonperishables entertained"). The other merchant is a Marsember

cooper and crater named Andreth Barloun, proprietor of Barloun's Barrels, a business with several locations ("Goods packed and sheathed by our expert and trustworthy crafters").

The Xraunran-controlled courtier is Aldegrand Tallfyre, Royal High Scribe of the Realm. He coordinates all written records except Privy documents (private royal family writings, such as wills, individual agreements, declarations of lineage, and correspondence) and Dark documents (the internal security records kept by the Wizards of War).

Tallfyre is a quiet, prim, humorless man, addicted to neatness, diligence, and etiquette. Long-serving and highly trusted, he wears an Obarskyr-gifted amulet that shields his mind. Unless he were to be accused of treason—with that accusation upheld by a member of the royal family—Tallfyre is above any magical surveillance or probing by the War Wizards.

The scribe is responsible for maintaining all government records as full, accurate documents that can be readily retrieved, and he knows their whereabouts at all times. The Xraunrans ensure that Tallfyre is good at making certain records disappear and substituting false replacements whenever cover-ups are needed. In addition, he quickly creates arrest orders (for fictitious crimes) for adventurers in Cormyr who mention "beholder plots" publicly or when speaking to War Wizards or lawkeepers.

The young, wealthy noble under Xraunran coercion is Tantram "Tallturrets" Bleyshar, who already controls most of the wealth of his nearly extinct house. His frail and elderly Aunt Shalice hasn't left certain upper rooms of Bleys Hard, the family's country mansion west of Gray Oaks, in decades. When she dies, Tantram will become the last living Bleyshar and inherit everything.

Courtiers and other nobles belittle Tantram as an unimportant wastrel, and commoners shun him for his snobbery, vicious temper, and cruel love of pranks. Bored and disaffected, he yearns to be respected by other nobles and fawned over by commoners, so the Xraunrans sent him a few young male and female sycophants. These flatterers have been magically compelled by the beholders to adore and praise Tantram and subtly suggest what he should do to become widely respected in Cormyr.

The noble family compelled by the Xraunrans is the old-money but minor house of Indulshields, best known for providing a haven long ago for King Duar, being ennobled for it, and keeping politically and socially quiet ever since. House Indulshields parlayed government contracts for providing drinking water to Suzail into a mighty drainage business that serviced farmers all over Cormyr; house members sold it off more than a century ago and have been living off the proceeds ever since. As the money dwindled, they fell deep into debt and, in their desperation, were easily led by beholder dream-visions and notions. It all started when "something" told Lord Kaerond Indulshields to wear his new circlet—a *crown of eyes* that he found while digging in his vegetable garden—to bed.

Notions imparted by the crown led House Indulshields through a series of profitable investments that were actually payoffs engineered by Xraunran manipulations. Having thus steered Kaerond into trusting the crown's advice, a distant Xraunran beholder mage then made a new suggestion: Kaerond should organize and fund a small cabal of nobles to operate as shadowy rebels, keeping the War Wizards busy while Xraunran agents worked unhampered elsewhere in the realm. Twice, Lord Indulshields has also quietly hired professional killers to silence adventurers who reported beholder sightings to Purple Dragons or War Wizards.

Kaerond is now primed to initiate each of his two sons and three daughters into wearing the crown in turn. The beholder mages intend to have the younger Indulshields lead other nobles to other *crowns of eyes*, thus spreading the influence of Xraunrarr.

The eye tyrants want the rulers of Cormyr to worry about lurking rebels and to suspect that certain nobles harbor treasonous thoughts, though not to become so alarmed that they crack down on the nobility. The Xraunrans also want a War Wizard to find and examine a *crown of eyes* so they can influence his mind and gain a puppet among the powerful battle-mages and sorcerers—perhaps the first of many.

If the beholders discover agents of the Shadovar or Thay in Cormyr, they will reveal those individuals to the Wizards of War. The Xraunrans wish the Dragon Throne to be cherished and upheld, seeing it as the eventual heart of the finest herd of humans under their control.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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